

DE GRUYTER

*Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson,
Peter Nicholls, Tania Ørum, Hubert van den Berg (Eds.)*

EUROPA! EUROPA?

THE AVANT-GARDE, MODERNISM
AND THE FATE OF A CONTINENT

EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDE AND MODERNISM STUDIES

Europa! Europa?

European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies

Etudes sur l'avant-garde
et le modernisme en Europe

Studien zur europäischen
Avantgarde und Moderne

Edited by
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Volume 1



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About the Series – Sur la collection – Zur Buchreihe

The avant-garde and modernism take centre-stage within European academia today. The experimental literatures and arts in Europe between ca. 1850 and 1950, and their aftermath, figure prominently on curricula, while modernism and avant-garde studies have come to form distinct yet interlocking disciplines within the humanities in recent years. These disciplines take on various guises on the continent. Within French and German academia, “modernism” remains a term rather alien – “die Moderne” and “modernité” coming perhaps the closest to what is meant by “modernism” within the English context. Here, indeed, modernism has acquired a firm place in research, signaling above all a period in modern poetics and aesthetics, roughly between 1850 and 1950, during which a revolt against prevalent traditions in art, literature and culture took shape. Similarly, the term “avant-garde” comes with an array of often conflicting connotations. For some, the avant-garde marks the most radically experimental arts and literatures in modernism from the 19th century onward – the early 20th-century vanguard movements of futurism, expressionism, dadaism and surrealism, among others, coinciding with the avant-garde’s most “heroic” phase. For others, the avant-garde belongs to a cultural or conceptual order differing altogether from that of modernism – the vanguard exploits from the 1950s onward marking that avant-garde arts and literatures can also perfectly abide outside modernism.

European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies, far from aiming to reduce the complexity of various European research traditions, aspires to embrace the wide linguistic, terminological and methodological variety within both fields. Publishing an anthology of essays in English, French and German every two years, the series wishes to compare and relate French, German and British, but also Northern and Southern as well as Central and Eastern European findings in avant-garde and modernism studies.

Collecting essays stemming mainly from the biennial conferences of the European Network from Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM), books in this series do not claim to exhaustiveness. Rather, they aim to raise questions, to provide partial answers, to fill lacunae in the research, and to stir debate about the European avant-garde and modernism throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The series attaches great value to interdisciplinary and intermedial research on experimental aesthetics and poetics, and intends to encourage an interest in the cultural dimensions and contexts of the avant-garde and modernism in Europe.

A digital addendum to the book series can be found on the website of the EAM: www.eam-europe.ugent.be. There, readers can consult and add to an open-source biblio-

graphy of books in avant-garde and modernism studies, maintained by Gunther Martens (Free University of Brussels). At present the bibliography already counts several thousands of titles in English, French and German, and it is our hope that it will become a vital point of reference in the exchange of expertise.

L'avant-garde et le modernisme occupent actuellement une place majeure dans les universités européennes. Les arts et les littératures expérimentaux en Europe de 1850 à 1950 et au-delà font partie intégrante des programmes universitaires, tandis que les recherches sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme sont devenues, à l'intérieur des sciences humaines, des disciplines à part entière mais solidaires les unes des autres. Ces disciplines varient néanmoins à travers le continent. Dans les universités françaises et allemandes, la notion de « modernisme » reste plutôt étrangère : les notions de « modernité » et de « Moderne » s'utilisent sans doute davantage pour ce que désigne la notion de « *modernism* » dans le contexte anglophone. Dans la recherche anglophone, en effet, la notion de « *modernism* » a acquis une certaine stabilité : elle désigne avant tout une période de la modernité poétique et esthétique, approximativement entre 1850 et 1950, au cours de laquelle a pris forme une révolte contre les traditions artistiques, littéraires et culturelles prédominantes. De la même façon, la notion d'« avant-garde » prend des connotations divergentes, souvent conflictuelles. Pour certains, l'« avant-garde » désigne les arts et les littératures les plus radicalement expérimentaux qui se développent à l'intérieur du modernisme à partir du XIX^e siècle. Dans ce cas, les mouvements avant-gardistes du début du XX^e siècle – dont le futurisme, l'expressionnisme, le dadaïsme et le surréalisme – correspondent à la phase avant-gardiste la plus « héroïque ». Pour d'autres, l'avant-garde appartient à un ordre culturel et conceptuel entièrement différent du modernisme. Dans cette perspective, l'avant-garde survit au modernisme, comme en témoigne la permanence d'une sensibilité avant-gardiste après 1950.

Loin de vouloir réduire la complexité et la variété des traditions de recherche européennes, *Etudes sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme en Europe* vise à embrasser la grande diversité linguistique, terminologique et méthodologique à l'intérieur de ces deux domaines de recherche. Par la publication d'un volume d'essais en anglais, en français et en allemand tous les deux ans, la collection souhaite comparer et mettre en rapport les résultats issus des traditions de recherche française, anglaise et allemande, mais également d'Europe nordique et méridionale, centrale et orientale.

Le premier objectif de cette collection est de rassembler une sélection des textes présentés lors des rencontres bisannuelles du Réseau européen

de recherche sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme (EAM). En ce sens, son ambition est moins d'épuiser un sujet que de soulever des questions, de suggérer quelques réponses provisoires, de combler certaines lacunes dans la recherche et, plus généralement, de maintenir vivant le débat sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme européens au cours des XIX^e et XX^e siècles. La collection attache beaucoup d'importance à la recherche interdisciplinaire et intermédiaire sur les esthétiques et les poétiques expérimentales et se propose de stimuler l'intérêt pour les dimensions culturelles et contextuelles de l'avant-garde et du modernisme en Europe.

Un complément numérique à la collection est offert par le site web de l'EAM: www.eam-europe.ugent.be. En ces pages, les lecteurs trouveront en libre accès, avec la possibilité d'y ajouter de nouvelles références, une bibliographie de livres sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme. La supervision et la mise à jour permanente de ce site sont assurées par Gunther Martens (VUB, Université Libre de Bruxelles). Actuellement, cette bibliographie comprend déjà plusieurs milliers d'entrées en anglais, en français et en allemand, et on peut espérer que cette banque de données se développera en un point de rencontre et d'échange de nos expertises.

Forschungsinitiativen zum Thema Avantgarde und Moderne nehmen in der europäischen Forschungslandschaft weiterhin zu. Die experimentellen Literaturen und die Künste in Europa zwischen ca. 1850 und 1950 und ihre Nachwirkungen sind als Lehr- und Forschungsbereiche an den europäischen Forschungsinstitutionen und in den Lehrplänen heutzutage nicht mehr wegzudenken. Avantgarde und Moderne haben sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten zu unterschiedlichen, aber mehrfach miteinander verzahnten Forschungsgebieten entwickelt. Innerhalb der französischen und deutschen akademischen Welt bleibt der Sammelbegriff „modernism“ weniger geläufig – „die (klassische) Moderne“ und „modernité“ fungieren hier als nabeliegende Äquivalente zu demjenigen, was im internationalen Kontext als eine zeitliche und räumliche Ko-Okkurrenz künstlerischer Ausdrucksformen und ästhetischer Theorien namhaft gemacht werden kann, die ungefähr zwischen 1850 und 1950 angesiedelt ist. Auf ähnliche Weise entfaltet die Bezeichnung „Avantgarde“ eine Reihe häufig widersprüchlicher Konnotationen. Für manche kennzeichnet die Avantgarde den radikalsten experimentellen Bruch der Künste und Literaturen mit den Darstellungs- und Erzählkonventionen des 19. Jahrhunderts: im frühen 20. Jahrhundert zeugen davon Avantgardebewegungen wie Futurismus, Expressionismus, Dadaismus und Surrealismus, Strömungen, die als die „heroische“ Phase der Avantgarde bezeichnet werden können. Ab den fünfziger Jahren kommt diese Avantgarde weitgehend ohne modernistische Begleiterscheinungen aus. Für andere gehört die Avantgarde zu einem kulturellen Umfeld, das sich, durchaus im Bunde mit der Klassischen Moderne, der Erneuerung ästhetischer Konventionen verschreibt.

Die Buchreihe Studien zur europäischen Avantgarde und Moderne möchte der Komplexität der unterschiedlichen europäischen Forschungstraditionen gerecht werden und strebt danach, die breite linguistische, terminologische und methodologische Vielfalt abzudecken. Anhand einer zweijährlichen Sammlung von Beiträgen in englischer, französischer und deutscher Sprache möchte die Reihe nicht nur die französische-, deutsch- und englischsprachigen, sondern auch die nord-, süd-, zentral- und osteuropäischen Ergebnisse der Avantgarde- und Moderne-Forschung einbeziehen.

Die Aufsatzsammlungen der Reihe, die größtenteils aus Beiträgen von den zweijährlichen Konferenzen des Europäischen Netzwerkes für Studien zu Avant-Garde und Moderne (EAM) bestehen, erheben keinen Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit. Ihr Ziel ist es vielmehr, Fragen zu stellen, einige Antworten vorzuschlagen, Forschungslücken zu schließen und Debatten über die europäische Avantgarde und die Moderne im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert auszulösen.

Die Studien zur europäischen Avantgarde und Moderne legen viel Wert auf die interdisziplinäre und intermediale Erforschung experimenteller Ästhetiken/Poetiken und setzen es sich zum Ziel, das Interesse an den kulturellen Zusammenhängen und Kontexten der Avantgarde und der Moderne in Europa anzuregen.

Ein digitales Addendum zur Buchreihe befindet sich auf der Internetseite von EAM: www.eam-europe.ugent.be. Dort können unsere Leser eine frei zugängliche Bibliographie zu Publikationen über Avantgarde und Moderne, die von Gunther Martens (Freie Universität Brüssel) verwaltet wird, besichtigen und ergänzen. Die Bibliographie enthält derzeit einige Tausend Titel auf Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch und wir hoffen, dass sie ein wichtiges Forum für den Austausch von Fachkenntnissen präsentieren wird.

Gent & New York, 2009

Sascha Bru & Peter Nicholls

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Introduction

Borderless Europe, Decentring Avant-Garde, Mosaic Modernism

Nearly all articles collected in this book are thoroughly reworked versions of contributions to *Europa! Europa?*, the founding conference of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM) held at Ghent University in May 2008.¹ Focusing mainly on the decades, roughly, from the late 19th century up and until the Second World War, but also paying attention to later outgrowths of the so-called historical avant-gardes, all articles in this volume discuss an aspect of the relation between the “avant-garde”, “modernism” and “Europe”. Given the wide range of ideas and connotations triggered by each of these three notions throughout the continent and beyond, it might appear superlatively naive to attempt to bring them in the same orbit within a single book. Yet, on closer inspection, there are good reasons for doing so, the most evident one being that the heterogeneous use of the terms “avant-garde”, “modernism”, and their cognates, clearly mirrors Europe’s cultural and historical complexity. Despite this obvious fact, to date research into how the avant-garde and modernism have dealt with “Europe” itself has remained dispersed, even though it is a truism that the European avant-garde and modernism have always tended to display an ambivalent attitude towards “Europe”. What was the “old” Europe that avant-gardists and modernists rebelled against? Which cultural and philosophical stakes were invested in making Europe new or different? To what extent has the idea or cultural construction of Europe differed geographically and historically? And how precisely did alternatives to the “old” Europe look in the various media, arts and literatures of the avant-garde and modernism? These questions define the bulk of this volume, which shows that there are no simple answers to them. This book sketches a composite image of Europe through the prism of modernism and the avant-gardes, and vice versa, of modernism and the avant-gardes through the lens of European history.

¹ For details about the theme and for all abstracts of papers presented at the conference, see: www.eam-europe.ugent.be.

Europe? “O, the continent”!

Europe is a continent with boundaries marked to the West by large bodies of water, to the far East by the Urals, Ural River and Caspian Sea. To anyone familiar with Europe’s modern history, this does not amount to saying much. Throughout the period this book focuses on, Europe’s internal borders were constantly redrawn – evidence of the highly unstable and crisis-ridden climate that marked the age. Indeed, when we ask what held (and still holds) everything and everyone together on this vast patch of land, consensus dictates that “Europe” was (and continues to be) defined by internal difference, dissensus and cultural diversity, by multiperspectivism and polyglossia.² To this day this culture of difference is cherished by some, experienced as threatening by others. This was not all that different a century ago. If there was a difference it is perhaps to be found in the deeply felt crisis associated with the overdetermined signifier “Europe”.

Throughout the period this book brings into focus, “Europe” was most frequently used as synonymous with the “West” – and, similarly, where we read “West”, very often we are to understand this as shorthand for “Europe”.³ Home to such universal value-systems as Christianity and the Enlightenment, the self-acclaimed cradle of humanity, beauty, tolerance and philosophy, a cultural and political entity rooted in Athens and Rome, and shaped by St Augustine, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare and Goethe, “Europe” (the “occident”) was of course also an economical power, the launching spot of colonialism, of the Industrial Revolution and of the steadfast modernisation of everyday life.

Since the Enlightenment countless intellectuals and politicians had projected a (federalist) Europe as the magnificent, ultimate stage in the history of the world. In 1867, for example, Victor Hugo, trailblazer of the Romantic Europeans, claimed that:

In the twentieth century there will be an extraordinary nation. This nation will be large, which will not prevent its being free. It will be illustrious, rich, thoughtful, peaceful, friendly towards the rest of humanity [...]. This nation will have Paris as its capital, but it will not be called France: it will be called Europe. It will be called

² See, for example, Antoine Compagnon’s and Jacques Seebacher’s three-volume anthology *L’Esprit de L’Europe*, Paris 1993.

³ See, among others, the still poignant Ernst Robert Curtius, *Kritische Essays zur Europäischen Literatur*, Bern 1954. For more thorough discussions of “europeita”, consult Carlo Curcio, *Europa, storia di un’Idea*, Firenze 1958, Heinz Gollwitzer *Europabild und Europagedanke*, München 1951; Eduardo Lourenço, *L’Europe introuvable. Jalons pour une mythologie européenne*, Paris 1991, and the various other books referenced in this volume.

Europe in the twentieth century; and in the centuries that follow, transformed still more, it will be called humanity.⁴

Like many before and after, Hugo dreamt of a humane, unified Europe, but at the same time exposed many of the West-centric and imperialist presumptions latent in such dreams before the outbreak of the Great War. It would indeed be from the West of Europe, from the cultural capital Paris no less (so central to the continental avant-gardes and modernism too), that the rest of Europe would be brought to “humanity”. The articulation of “Europe” and “man” – also quite important in the avant-gardes, as they tried to put forth a “new” man – thus implied not just the superiority of the West over the East of Europe. It further voiced the confidence with which Western Europeans depicted themselves as the great civilisers and colonisers of other continents. Moreover, Hugo’s words subtly echoed the boost of nationalism that concurred throughout the continent with the increasing appeal of a federate Europe: the capital of his large nation would be Paris, but, he made sure to add, this nation would *not* be called France. Indeed, by the end of the century, the French stood among a league of Western nations either claiming the centre of “Europe” or staunchly opposing the idea of it gaining political unity. As a result, revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel, commenting on the plans for a United States of Europe, could write in 1908:

In America, they have made a federation of people who are all alike, living in similar states [...]. Bravo! But how do you propose to federate the Slavs, who are either religious or mystic revolutionaries; the sober Scandinavians; the ambitious Germans; the freedom-loving English; the greedy French; the Italians with their economic crisis; the Balkan poachers; and the belligerent Hungarians? How will you settle this basket of crabs which snap at each other all the livelong day? Miserable Europe! Why conceal what is in store for her? Within ten years, she will sink into war and anarchy as she has always done two or three times every 100 years.⁵

Pregnant with stereotypes, Sorel’s words had a visionary ring to them. Not ten but six years later the Great War would indeed crowd forward, temporarily destroying both the prospect of an imperialism of European states, and the dreams of an international workers’ movement which Sorel shared with Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and many others.

⁴ Hugo’s famous article “L’avenir”, quoted in Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Europe. A History of Its Peoples*, London 1990, 324.

⁵ Sorel quoted in Duroselle, *Europe*, 346.

Europe's demise as a cultural empire, too, loomed large around the turn of the century. As is well rehearsed, pessimistic evocations of its decline were quite common in fin-de-siècle milieus. Arthur Schnitzler's allegorical depiction of Vienna's Ring as a gigantic prison whose contours resembled those of the continent needs but be recalled here. Georg Trakl's *Sebastian in the Dream* could be mentioned as well, because it prefigured the monstrosity to come with unprecedented lucidity.⁶ Just before the outbreak of the Great War, in 1913, Miguel de Unamuno, too, wondered "Who can say today (at least in Spain) what Europe is?"⁷ And, in the two-volume *The Decline of the West* (1918-1923, yet written for the most part before 1914), Oswald Spengler was loath to speak of "Europe", a word he thought should be eradicated from history. Preferring to talk about the "occident" instead, Spengler upheld that Europe was witnessing the autumn of its culture.

With the advent of the First World War, the seemingly self-evident articulation of "Europe" and "Western culture" finally received a near lethal blow. Unsurprisingly, most contributions to this book focus on the period during and after the First World War. For, it was at this point that all West-centric notions of "Europe" got fundamentally questioned – also within the ranks of the avant-garde and modernism. Indeed, after the war, countless stories, essays, magazines, and artists' and writers' correspondence on the continent suddenly turned Europe into a topos in aesthetic debate.⁸ The "old" Europe had met its limit – a "new" Europe could finally emerge. Paul Valéry captured the post-war sense of desolation and exaltation well in his famous essay "The Crisis of the Spirit" (1919). Europe, Valéry claimed, had finally stood face to face with its own mortality, making it enter into a Narcissist phase of consciousness.⁹

J.H. Valeize in France, Friedrich Naumann, Hermann Kranold and Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi in Germany and Austria, C.F. Heerfordt in Denmark and José Ortega y Gasset in Spain were but a few intellectuals who shortly after the war began adding to a spate of books once again reconsidering the future of Europe and Europeanism. Although the tenor of these books was often far removed from that of the avant-gardes and

⁶ See Pascal Dethurens, *Écriture et culture. Écrivains et philosophes face à l'Europe*, Paris 1997, 21, and 28-30.

⁷ Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, tr. Anthony Kerrigan, Princeton 1977, 326.

⁸ Paul Michael Lützeler, *Die Schriftsteller und Europa. Von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart*, München 1992, 272 ff.

⁹ Paul Valéry, "The Crisis of the Spirit", in: *Paul Valéry: An Anthology*, ed. and tr. J.R. Lawler, London 1977, 94-107.

modernism, at least some of the issues raised in the former also informed the latter. Ever more loudly, for instance, debates were waged over how Europe related to other continents.¹⁰ Western Eurocentrism as well got inescapably questioned, as for example the notion of an “East-Central Europe” began to be used widely in the interwar period to denote a variety of (new) independent states in the region between Germany and Russia. And, at the risk of stating the obvious, nationalist sentiments, too, continued to be voiced in the post-war period, their steadfast rise in Germany after the installation of the Weimar Republic culminating in the stale Nazi notion of *Europa*, matched, in the South, by Mussolini’s cult of *romanità*.

Not without reason, considering the cataclysmic outcome of those nationalist sentiments, many continued to sing the swansong of European civilisation. Franz Kafka’s enigmatic Hotel Occidental in *Amerika* (posthumous, 1927), James Joyce’s patron saint of Europe in *Ulysses* (1922), and Proust’s Charlus, who near the end of *Remembrance of Things Past* devises the last European courses: they were all part and parcel of the many variations on the *Decline-of-the-West*-theme, laid out in a veritable mosaic in the run up to and in the wake of the First World War. This tendency is perhaps best illustrated by the words of Julia, a character in Joyce’s “The Dead”: “O, on the continent’, murmured Aunt Julia, nodding her head slowly” – as if to double Europe’s slow disintegration.¹¹

While fear of change and nostalgia for the past set the agenda for some, other writers and artists, from the late 19th century onward, began to voice a more positive, albeit searching and (today still) open-ended, counter-tendency in which the detriment of (cultural) warfare was met with laughter and humour. The avant-gardes in particular began to voice a plethora of other ways of dealing with “Europe”, which very often came with far more optimistic connotations, though a sense of Apocalypse, here as well, was the initial trigger – Kurt Schwitter’s Merz needs but be recalled here, as it rebuilt a universe from European *things* left to waste. Caught between a longing for a return to pre-modern (aesthetic) practices and a fascination for all things modern, between a Romantic desire to

¹⁰ Among others long before this point, Friedrich Nietzsche had stressed the importance of avoiding that Europeans gain a fixed common identity. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), he claimed that Europeans in his day came to resemble one another more and more, steadily uniting themselves in a single herd through the process of democratisation. Caught between America to the West, Asia to the East, Nietzsche thought that Europe was to define itself as interpreter and mediator between East and West, thus, as a fluid cultural entity that would never settle but always keep evolving and borrowing from others.

¹¹ James Joyce, *Dubliners*, annotated by Terence Brown, London 1992, 181.

safeguard the artist's sovereignty and a yearning to produce an art accessible to (and producible by) the masses, and prompted by the prospect of a universal (aesthetic) language as well as the wish to keep local cultures in check, the other "Europes" of the avant-gardes were as colourful as they were diverse. In addition, those other "Europes" only show themselves to us today when we recall the complex ways in which the avant-gardes tried to renew art and bend the socio-cultural status it had been endowed in the course of modernity. Nonetheless, as illustrated by this book, it would not be exaggerated to regard the so-called historical avant-gardes themselves – that is, the vast networks of artists and writers spanning the continent (and beyond), their many magazines, "portable" works and texts – as having formed an alternative European *community*. Multilingual, fragile but agile, decentring and resisting definition, the avant-gardes could, ripping a title of an essay by Franz Marc out of context, be situated within a "Secret Europe",¹² a United Europe without States, grounded in aesthetics, in a grass-roots attempt to find radically alternate forms of writing and producing art so as to subsequently renew European culture, and life.

In 1921, Dutch jack-of-all-trades Theo van Doesburg put it perhaps most succinctly when he wrote:

[The term] *avant-garde* always already implies an International of the Spirit. This International knows no rules other than the instinctive desire to give life an ideal and realist expression and to interpret life within art in a pure and aesthetic way. [The avant-garde] forms a disorderly troop, scattered over all nations.¹³

Naturally, this *Europia*, the transnational, imaginary space evoked by Van Doesburg, did not always correspond with reality. As shown by quite a few contributions to this book, the transnational space onto which the avant-garde opened very often went hand in hand with nationalist agendas. But this does arguably not demean the radicalism with which the avant-gardes, taken together, came to embody an alternative European community. Rather, it shows how the avant-gardes' "Secret Europe", too, was a colonised space in which subjects always had to settle with other, dominant notions of Europe and identity.¹⁴

It is above all in the works of the avant-garde and experimental modernists that we encounter alternative ways (some of which soon proved to

¹² Franz Marc, "Das geheime Europa", in: *Das Forum*, 1, 1914-15, 630-6.

¹³ Theo van Doesburg, "Revue der Avantgarde", in: *Het Getij*, 1, 1921, 109-12, my translation.

¹⁴ See also Sascha Bru, *Democracy, Law and the Modernist Avant-Gardes. Writing in the State of Exception*, Edinburgh 2009.

have dead-ends) to think about and represent “Europe”. Given the array of connotations attached to the signifier “Europe”, it is indeed not surprising that avant-garde and modernist works very often voiced responses to the prevalent cultural and political crisis. Convinced that through explorations of the arts’ materiality and media’s specificity a truly universal language, accessible to all, could emerge (see, for example, Andrew McNamara’s essay here on colour-form experiments), the project of another “Europe” was deeply inscribed in many exploits.

Written in Germany shortly after the Great War, Flemish exile and expressionist Paul van Ostaijen’s poetry volume *Occupied City* (1921) can in many respects be seen as exemplary of the other “Europes” thus fleshed out. Prefiguring Freud’s *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1929), *Occupied City* turned to bodily desire as a “faculty” capable of redefining the fate of all Europeans. Combining typographical experiments, hand-written patches and colour prints, the volume opens with a long poem entitled “Dedication to Mr. Such-and-Such”. This poem first performs an apodictic desemanticisation of the signifier “Europe”. “Nihil in ...” is a phrase that occurs over twenty times, as Van Ostaijen removes all European traditions and cultural institutions from the semantic paradigm of the signifier “Europe”. Hinting at the fact that another Europe will be geared at, and with its outer borders already defined for the poet by geography, it is to the internal borders of Europe that he then turns. Thus goes (and note that here I refrain from reproducing the volume’s typography, merely marking line-endings and caps): “You have gone through all the ballads of Europe/ Your expectations die/ [...] PLACE BLANCHE/ and it is to your considerable merit/ inventor of a map/ Europe according to its erotic channels/ we have known Europe for só long só long/ stretched elongated sideways and upwards/ geologically/ river-basin/ politically/ religiously/ commercially/ and so on and so on/ but/ this erotic map/ is a necessity/ soon private tutors will/ give courses/ about the invention of man until now”.¹⁵ A *blank* map of Europe is thus handed to us on one of the first pages of Van Ostaijen’s *Occupied City* – “Place blanche”, here of course signalling more than the famous square in Paris, invites a reader to fill the map according to his or her own desire; *erotic* or sensual, bodily desire thereby foregrounded as the only “faculty” performing judgement. It will be to the readers merit: to move across Europe (in a dandyesque fashion) contemplating where borders could lie.

¹⁵ Paul van Ostaijen, *Verzameld Werk*, Vol. II, ed. Gerrit Borgers, Antwerp-The Hague-Amsterdam 1952, “Opdracht aan Mijnheer Zoenzo”, n.p., my translation.

Van Ostaijen's evocation of the "old" Europe, which had been known "for só long, só long", reiterates with relative precision the "Europe" = "West" articulation outlined above. Like Hugo, the poet takes as his starting point the cultural centre of Paris (while, notably, himself writing in Berlin, that other Western (Central?) European cultural capital). Yet unlike most of his predecessors, he appeals to desire and play, to a form of vitalism not to be reduced to reason or metaphysics. At its close, *Occupied City*, whose stuttering narrative in part recounts the occupation by the Germans of the Flemish seaport town of Antwerp during the Great War, leaves readers with the same blank map, surrounded by highly experimental lines of poetry triggering the imagination and foregrounding their own materiality. Opening the West up to Europe's Eastern borders, moreover, the volume's blank map comes to include the Centre of the continent. Referring to suppressed peoples throughout Europe in his other writings – Van Ostaijen wrote in Dutch, in a culture dominated by a francophone elite (see the essay by Roland, Mus, and Van Mol here) – and appealing to Europe as a politico-cultural umbrella under which everyone could come to live in peace, his message may have sounded familiar in 1921, but it clearly came with a differential edge.

West – Centre – East

"We fall – not the wall"

Paul van Ostaijen, *Occupied City*

From October to May 1994, in the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, Ryszard Stanislawski and Christoph Brockhaus set up a large exhibition paying attention to all experimental Central and Eastern European arts and literatures of the preceding century. In his introduction to the four-volume catalogue, Stanislawski wrote:

We present the exhibition *Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa* convinced that it will highlight neglected aspects and fill lacunae, which, due to a lack of information and dialogue in the past fifty years, have only grown in number. Half a century, that is two generations – in the case of Russia three generations – which have been bestowed, either fully or partially, from contact with the culture of Western Europe; in turn, that Europe has been practically denied access to its full, not just official, artistic creation.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ryszard Stanislawski and Christoph Brockhaus (eds.), *Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Vol. 1 of 4, Bonn 1994, 21.

A few decades after the lifting of the Iron Curtain a lot has changed, as can be deduced from various essays in this book. Yet many of the “neglected aspects” Stanislawski hinted at remain neglected today – and this holds true, conspicuously, not just for the arts produced during the Cold War period; it also goes for preceding modernist and avant-garde exploits. Presenting essays in French, English and German, part of this book’s intention is precisely to fill the lacunae *Europa*, *Europa* signalled. This is ultimately why readers will find less about Russian modernism and avant-gardes, which have always been part of the Western canon – not least because they were often seen as alternatives to West-centric culture, especially after 1917 – and more about (at least in the West) lesser known Eastern and Central European modernism and the avant-garde.

The views of Europe that emerged in this “Other”, this heterogeneous region of the continent, never quite matched those taken for granted in the West. As illustrated by Svetlana Ilieva’s contribution on the Bulgarian avant-gardes, and Ayelet Marczyk’s essay on Polish modernism, the articulation “Europe” = “West” was not uncommon, yet always came with a different ring. Occidental modernity and modernisation appealed to many, yet at the same time one of the pivotal concerns was to safeguard a sense of local identity. Like Marinetti in the South, still others felt that Western European culture had gone bankrupt beyond refute. In this context, it suffices to leaf through the Serbian magazine *Zenit*, here discussed by Delphine Bière-Chauvel, and to consider its editor-in-chief Ljubomir Micić’s plan to Balkanise, that is, to *de-civilise*, the continent, so that finally a truly “new” man could emerge.

What such cases ultimately highlight are the vexed issues of how to group together Central and Eastern European avant-gardes and modernism, and of how to relate them to the dominant, Western reference points we are better acquainted with. This book does not claim to have the final say about these issues. Rather, it aims to echo questions raised in previous studies, by illustrating the relevance of relating the avant-garde and modernism in this region to notions of “Europe”. For, in the end, discussions of “East-Central”, “South-East Central”, “Eastern”, ... European avant-gardes and modernism are also inextricably tied to how “Europe” was viewed in these regions. Does/did Central Europe include Berlin (and perhaps even the whole of Germany)? If so, was this part of Europe more than a mere geographical entity? – Europe in its entirety, according to Otto von Bismarck, being little more than such a geographical entity. Ranging from the Baltic to the Balkans, having been caught between the great Latin and Greek traditions, while also being deeply entrenched in Slavic, Germanic and Gaelic cultures, what (if anything) ties together this particular part of Europe? To an extent such

questions are unfounded: the “West” too was anything but a homogenous cultural entity. This does not make the issue less pressing, though, to those critics and scholars coming with fresh eyes, eager to learn and absorb, to this “Other” Europe, which, as Piotr Piotrowski argues here, fell both within and outside the Western frame of reference. All of these questions, to be sure, come on top of queries related to the internationalisation of the avant-gardes and modernism in Central Europe – many of which have been given answers in the past few decades. And, as such, those questions also go to the problem tackled in the opening section of this book: Looking back on their complex afterlife in post-1945 scholarly debate and artistic practice, (how) do “modernism” and the “avant-garde” work as (European) concepts?

Terms and Canons

Readers going through the table of contents will no doubt quickly spot a further aim of this book: by making room for contributions written by young as well as established scholars coming from various disciplines and some twenty countries, we hope to inform literary scholars of tendencies and problems in the arts, but also, vice versa, to dip art historians into the problems of their colleagues studying other arts and literatures. General theoretical and historiographical issues take up the first section of the book. Here, we have tried to avoid repeating the many exposés on the history and particular local (French, British, German, ...) entrenchments of the terms “avant-garde”, “modernism” and related notions. Instead, we hope to present issues of general relevance to the study of the European avant-garde and modernism, and their outgrowths.

In the opening article, however, Astradur Eysteinnsson first does take us back to familiar ground, looking at the ways in which “modernism” and the “avant-garde” have been distinguished in the past, and noting that as far as their textual output goes, the differences between these two notions very often tend to be blurred. Marijan Dović, introducing a number of important Slovenian avant-gardists who have not received much attention outside the region, disagrees with Eysteinnsson, mounting a case for viewing the “avant-garde” not just as a textual but also as a social and cultural phenomenon. Broadening the horizon so that our scope comes to include all neglected “peripheral” or “marginal” avant-gardes, Piotrowski argues for a “horizontal” history of the avant-gardes that questions the centrality of the “Western” canon and recognizes that there were indeed other “Europes” too, which deserve equal treatment. Continuing this attempt to question the canon, William Marx avers that we can only come

to a full understanding of modernism and the avant-garde when we also bring into scope the “arrière-garde”. Taking stock of art critical debates in Paris after the Second World War, Natalie Adamson unfolds a case that in some ways seconds, in others contradicts Marx’ argument. Finally, in an essay dealing with the role the avant-gardes and experimental modernists have played in 20th-century (literary) theory, Sascha Bru ends up suggesting that our theoretical approaches to “European literature” and “European avant-garde” come close to overlapping, as the way we read today is highly indebted to avant-garde writing. As in other sections, there is not always consensus here; above all there is a wish to enter into debate.

Images and Ideas

The second section of this book gathers essays dealing specifically with the way in which “Europe” circulated in the avant-gardes and modernism, from the West to the East. In the first article Cristina Fossaluzza discusses Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s reaction to the decline of the West as a cultural empire, exposing the vast shadow of Romanticism cast over many artists and writers associated with both modernism and the avant-gardes as they dealt with “Europe” around the turn of the century. Very often, though, writers and artists commonly considered as part of the avant-gardes differed from modernists by their choice to *actively* seize the moment and construct a post-Romantic Europe radically different from the past; a *decentred* and *detransnationalised* Europe, moreover, as for example proposed by Claire and Yvan Goll, here discussed by Andreas Kramer. A project to root another, aesthetic Europe in the rhizomatic networks of artists, writers and their exploits, can also be encountered (albeit *in dubio*) in the review *Zenit*. As Bière-Chauvel illustrates, this review, like so many other initiatives launched from the Centre of Europe, functioned as a bridge between the West and the East. Similarly capturing the European community of the arts is the 1925 almanach *Europa*, disclosed here by Liliane Meffre.

Svetlana Ilieva and Ayelet Marczyk turn to how “Europe” was viewed in Bulgaria and Poland, respectively. Both attracted to and distanced from the West, the image and idea of Europe to emerge here recalls that the avant-garde’s aesthetic European community and its *realpolitisch* counterpart did not always coincide. This is brought to the fore very clearly in Mechthild Albert’s article on Spanish avant-gardist Ernesto Giménez Caballero, whose work displayed a strong desire to be taken up in the avant-garde’s European community on the one hand, while voicing totalitarian, pan-Mediterranean and anti-European political views on the other.

Likewise, Ezra Pound's pre-Pisan drafts of the *Cantos* hint at the darker patches of the European avant-garde and modernism. An American exile claiming to believe in nothing but European tradition, Pound harked back to a time before medieval Europe and to folk Catholicism. The reading Ronald Bush performs here makes felt that for many Christianity continued to define the core of European-ness – an issue further explored in the third section of this book, where Pound is placed shoulder to shoulder with Central European avant-gardists and back to back with Schwitters.

In the two essays that close this section, Lara Feigel and Noit Banai evidence that the interwar “International of the Spirit” (Van Doesburg) continued to inspire writers and artists in the period immediately after the Second World War. Feigel foregrounds attempts of late modernist British writers to help in the reconstruction of Germany, recalling the role of, among others, PEN in European political debate. Scrutinising Yves Klein's and Werner Ruhnau's project to build the Geselkirchen Musiktheater in the German Ruhr area, Banai not only reminds us of the always troubled dialogue between France and Germany in European history. He brings out how Klein and Ruhnau took their project to be a site for experimenting with other ways of conceiving Europe and citizenship within it.

Tendencies and Identities

In the third section of the book we take a closer look at issues related to European (artistic) identity, and at the ways in which older currents and tendencies in European culture continued to inform modernists and avant-gardists in their experimental practice. Zooming in on the exchange between Belgian and German writers and artists, Dennis Van Mol, Hubert Roland and Francis Mus illustrate that nationalism and internationalism, in the *West* of Europe, too, went hand in hand when modernists and avant-gardists belonging to minority cultures came to define their identity. Irina Genova, focusing on Bulgarian avant-garde artists Georges Papazoff and Nicolay Diulgheroff, shows how national identities very often continue to define art history. To anyone considering the work of these two artists, there can be little doubt about its quality. And yet, in Bulgarian as well as in European art history, these two artists, who led a nomadic life and never fully adhered to any vanguard movement, are totally absent. By contrast, as Jed Rasula shows, other European avant-gardists had all the luck. Guillaume Apollinaire was so omnipresent in European aesthetic debate that Belgian poet Clément Pansaers claimed to belong to “le mouvement Apollinaire” when he introduced himself to Tristan Tzara. As such, Apollinaire's identity and position within the aesthetic realm not only

question the tendency to consider the avant-gardes in terms of movements and styles. Equally, his artistic identity can be seen as emblematic of the kind of alternate European networks the avant-garde already began to set up before the Great War.

Three subsequent essays then focus on the way in which older European traditions and tendencies in thought continued to inform the practice of radical modernists and avant-gardists. It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that the avant-gardes and experimental modernists remained tributary to (more radical) currents in Enlightened thought and Romanticism. But how did these (frequently self-acclaimed) “iconoclasts” relate to religion – an entity that not only united but also divided the continent? Focusing among others on the views of Bauhaus professor Lothar Schreyer, Lidia Gluchowska shows that Central European avant-gardists very often looked to mysticism, occultism and pre-modern forms of religious praxis in producing their work. For some this came with the promise of inventing a truly transnational (aesthetic) language, for others it was a means to reinforce prevalent nationalist paradigms. Similarly, Götz-Lothar Darsow zooms in on the traces of Judeo-Christian traditions in the work of Kurt Schwitters. Vivian Liska, finally, looks more closely at the role of Jewish religion and identity in the exploits of some of the best-known messianic expressionists.

The last two essays in this section turn specifically to literature yet raise issues of significance to the arts as well. Julia Tidigs emphasises one of the defining features of European culture and of modernism/the avant-garde: multilingualism. Looking at its role in the particular case of Finland-Swedish writer Elmer Diktonius, Tidigs illustrates how Diktonius, following the examples of Esperanto and many other “artificial” languages, such as Eugène Jolas’ (thwarted) plans to create a universal language, devised his own, deterritorialised and deterritorialising language, thereby making it impossible to reinsert the identity of his work in given categories. Looking at the writing of the self and the plight of gender and sex therein, Andrea Oberhuber’s essay takes a leap in time to the “neo-surrealist” work of Nelly Kaplan/Belen. With an oeuvre constantly bending and seeking out the limits of identity, Kaplan/Belen illustrates that significant tendencies and tactics of foregoing avant-gardes and modernists continued to inform aesthetic practice in a fruitful manner after the *événements*, when questions of vanguard European identity once again came to set the agenda.

Europe and Its Others

In the final section of the book we focus on how “Europe” in the avant-garde and modernism was related to other continents, and on how experimental writers and artists from non-European regions in turn looked at Europe. Kai Mikkonen first zooms in on how “Africa” helped define European-ness in the work of F.T. Marinetti and Tristan Tzara. Upping the ante, Rainer Rumold recalls the fascinating work of Carl Einstein on African art and his “ethnographie du blanc”, asking whether we will ever be able to view such art outside Western aesthetic frames of reference. In her essay on radio-playwright Paul Deharme, Anke Birkenmaier opens up a different “other” of Europe: the ether, the space of sound-waves concurrently explored by the avant-garde. Focussing on Deharme, whose (surrealist) aim was to deploy radio’s medium-specificity to bring listeners to dreamlike states, Birkenmaier highlights why Deharme’s plays were perhaps not accidentally always set on non-European continents.

Turning the table, and looking at Europe from another continent, Isabelle Krzywkowski charts how Latin-American, and more specifically the Peruvian, avant-gardes dealt with “Europe”. She illustrates that the vanguard European community formed an unavoidable stop, in a “rite of passage”, for those avant-gardes to ultimately attain their own, local distinctiveness. A similar rite of passage is thematised in Esther Sanchez-Pardo’s article on Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. Drawing on Spengler, Carpentier came to relativise the imperialism of European culture, putting forth his own variant of the surrealist *merveilleux* to arrive at a non-essentialist notion of Latin-American culture.

Thomas Borgard returns to Europe, bringing into the limelight Eugène Jolas’ famous bridge between Europe and the US: *transition*. The transatlantic project inscribed in this magazine uncovers the crisis of European individualism for which Jolas looked to the US for salvation. Moving forward in time, and looking at Europe through the work of Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara, Wolfgang Müller-Funk goes as far back as St Augustine and uncovers through the work of On Kawara yet another series of experiential problems to be encountered in Western European culture. In the final essay, Andrew McNamara casts a bridge from Australia to the continent, highlighting the “colour” of Europe and the role of colour-form experiments in Oceania and Europe. Of the many conclusions to be drawn from this final essay perhaps one should be mentioned here: the project of the avant-gardes and experimental modernists is as open-ended as discussions about European cultural unification are inconclusive.

Ach Europa, and Thanks

In *Ach Europa* (1987)¹⁷ Hans Magnus Enzensberger reported on his journey through the continent. One question was on his mind: why, despite the long and bloody history of Europe, from its inception to the Cold War, was Europe still standing? His answer sounded as familiar as it needs repeating today: the strength of Europe is its commonality in difference. This is arguably not contradicted by the many “Europes” that surface from the European avant-gardes and modernism. They do, however, further remind us of the importance (and danger) of aesthetic experience and representation when it comes to Europe. Although the various other “Europes” they gave rise to were never quite given the chance to mature properly, their project to devise different ways of seeing and sensing Europe’s multicultural implications and traditions still warrants attention from those interested in European culture and politics today.

All of this adds up to a relatively bulky book, whose essays interrelate in various ways not mentioned here. In compiling the book, our ordering principle has been a spatial one above all, yet although attentive readers will chance upon few patches of the continent left untouched here, this volume can hardly claim to exhaustiveness. It is to be read as an incision, as the beginning of a more encompassing series, each volume of which will deal with a specific aspect of the avant-garde and modernism in Europe. This is also why this book lacks a joint bibliography at its end. The series launched with this volume disposes of a more encompassing, open-source digital bibliography to which all titles in the present book will be added as well.¹⁸ However, readers will find the names of all authors referenced in this book in the index. The issue of transliteration is partially “solved” in the index by enlisting mainly English transliterations of names. Almost all essays in this book also provide translations of the material quoted.

Our gratitude goes to the contributors first and foremost. Additional thanks go to the members of the editorial board, to Niels Cuelenaere, Heiko Hartmann and to Eva Pszeniczko.

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¹⁷ Parts of which have been translated into English in *Civil War* (London 1994) by Piers Spence and Martin Chambers.

¹⁸ See: <http://www.cam-europe.ugent.be/wiki/doku.php>

Terms and Canons

“What’s the Difference?”
Revisiting the Concepts of Modernism
and the Avant-Garde

Astradur Eysteinnsson (University of Iceland)

The Second World War was not a particularly disastrous event in my home country, Iceland, except for those who thoroughly disliked the rapid process of modernization which it initiated by the arrival of foreign, first British and later US military forces who occupied the country in order to secure this strategic landmass in the middle of the North Atlantic. The forces of occupation brought money and machinery to an island that had been, technologically and economically, a slow-moving creature. For some the foreign presence was also a cultural attraction, and there were those who were drawn by the newness of the foreigners themselves, with their whiff of a different world beyond the ocean. I once heard a story about a fellow who spent a lot of time associating with the Americans at the main military base in Iceland. But there was one problem. His English, at least his spoken English, was almost nonexistent. He found a solution which was a lot quicker than the slow arduous task of learning to speak this foreign language. He somehow happened upon a phrase that seemed to work as an intelligent-sounding answer or comment to whatever his American acquaintances were saying. This phrase was the question: “What’s the difference?” Asking this question every now and then nicely lubricated his way into conversation and company.

“What’s the difference?” The implication would often seem to be: What difference does it make? (whatever the others were saying). Or: “Does that matter?” “Where does that leave us?” There is something at once playful and highly pragmatic about this use of language, and definitely something performative. This phrase is like a found object. It is in fact a “found phrase”, which can be thrown into use in any number of situations. The playful aspect of it, looked at or picked up from the outside, perhaps comes from the significance and foregrounding of what

Roman Jakobson called the phatic element of communication.¹⁹ While the addressees may receive the comment as a referential signifier, the “real meaning” of it is something like “yes, I’m here, I hear you, we’re communicating, this channel is working”.

One could discuss this in terms of Saussurean, Derridean, Austinian and probably also Wittgensteinian implications of meaning and use of language, not least the meaning of difference at a meta-linguistic level (from this point of view the non-English-speaking-Icelander is a master metalinguist). But more important for my present purposes is the performance involved, this inventive piece of acting, blurring as it does the borderline between the art of getting by, being part of a community, and sheer conmanship or bluffing. Is this borderline not one of the strings in the avant-garde instrument, where it is in fact foregrounded, where its metafunction is turned into a first-level topic? Is this not also a moment where “art” runs seamlessly into “real life” and vice versa (according to some the very dream, the *jouissance*, of the avant-garde)? And do we not witness here the experimental and playful aspects of the avant-garde desire to unveil the contingency, the made-up-ness of grand meanings?

Either Or?

What’s the difference? Is this a serious or in fact a crucial question when observing the concepts of modernism and the avant-garde, the two terms that have been brought together in this book’s very title? How do we gauge and evaluate the often strongly contingent, circumstantial and sometimes playful elements in the way the relationship between the two concepts is thought of and orchestrated (sometimes silently, also when only using one of the two terms). “Playful” certainly in the serious sense of deriving meaning from precisely the looseness of and manipulation with difference. How does the context of the investigation (the research) bend and inflect the metacritical categories – ultimately also as concerns *value*?

Let me stay native a little bit longer. World War Two constituted a watershed in cultural traffic in Iceland, and while the interwar period had seen some experiments we may call modernist or avant-garde, and critical reactions to these, it was in the wake of World War II that all hell broke loose (finally the war was on in Iceland), especially when several young

¹⁹ Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics”, in: Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, Cambridge, Mass. 1987, 62-94, here 68.

poets and painters started performing art in clear violation of the traditional norms. They were not always greeted with a polite, inquisitive “What’s the difference?” – and I should add that the contract to extend the American military presence in the country was not received peacefully either. In both cases, many felt that a highly questionable foreign body had invaded the native system. The ideological trenches criss-crossed in ways that blurred political oppositions and at the same time politicized the cultural field. There were those who opposed both the new modern poetry and abstract painting *and* the American presence for similar reasons: these were foreign elements that undermined the native culture. But then there were those who supported the military contract (which was also economic of course), but saw the new poetry and the painting as threatening foreign presences. Conversely, many of the artists and writers who were radicalizing their aesthetic fields were outspoken opponents of the NATO alliance and the American connection. In this context, innovative literary discourse was hardly thought of as apolitical – something which has now been a cliché in literary scholarship for a long time, very often in comments that couple “apolitical” with “modernism” in a kneejerk motion.

The post-World War II entry of this new poetry into Icelandic literature, not to mention the equivalent paradigm shift in the novel, which barely occurred until the mid-1960s, came to be thought of as a late or even belated breakthrough of *modernism*, although it did not often go by that name at the time, nor by the designation *avant-garde* either, although that concept had been around already in the first half of the 20th century. It was called many names, until the requirements of institutional discourse led to the adoption of the foreign term “modernism” (*móðernismi*) – while the actual inscription of the term “avant-garde” (*framúrstefna*) in Iceland has always remained somewhat unclear and unfocused to this day – although my colleague Benedikt Hjartarson is now in the process of mapping such activities and their discursive traces.²⁰ This does *not* mean that a fair amount of the aesthetic practice in question could not be called avant-garde. However, the critical and institutional inscription of this new paradigm occurred at close counters with Scandinavian and English-language criticism and scholarship. And in this context – and it’s important that we are talking about the mid-to-late 20th-century institutional

²⁰ Benedikt Hjartarson, “Af úrkynjun, brautryðjendum, vanskapnaði, vitum og sjáendum. Um upphaf framúrstefnu á Íslandi”, in: *Ritid*, 1, 2006, 79-119, and “Dragging Nordic Horses past the Sludge of Extremes. The Beginnings of the Icelandic Avant-Garde”, in: Sascha Bru and Gunther Martens (eds.), *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde (1906-1940)*, Amsterdam-New York 2006, 235-63.

scene – the question “What’s the difference?” (between modernism and the avant-garde) could be answered with a composed “None to speak of, we might as well use modernism to cover this whole paradigm”, *or* with a vehement: “The difference is crucial and has a lot to do with how we register literary innovation in terms of literary history and literary value”. And here we are already in the swing of things.

Bradbury and McFarlane, the editors of the widespread and influential Penguin symposium *Modernism 1890-1930* – a key-work in the dissemination of modernism studies, for instance at colleges throughout the US and the British Isles and beyond – state in an essay they co-wrote for the book:

Now the great, achieved works of the entire endeavour began to stand out in their significance; and newer ones began to appear, their creation made possible by the already large stockpile of *avant-garde* debate and achievement. Here you could see the Modernist impulse transcending, often, the tendencies which had pushed and forced forward new modes, new presumptions. And works like *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land* or the *Duino Elegies* are acts of modernized imagination for which no movement explanation can ever properly fit.²¹

Modernism here works *both* as an overarching concept that includes the various avant-gardes, *and* as an endeavour that produces, ultimately, the canonical works which become sign posts of literary history. The “Modernist impulse” transcends, in a transforming act of elevation, the grounds where it was presumably bred, the place where there seems to be a good deal of less distinguished avant-garde activity.

Iconoclasm and Reconstruction

I have used the above Bradbury and McFarlane quotation before in discussing this particular issue,²² for it seems to me to sum up, unashamedly, a very widespread sentiment. And while it exemplifies the canonization that often goes on in the name of modernism, it does acknowledge the vital role of the avant-garde as a sort of grassroots activity – which could be seen as valuable from this point of view. But the

²¹ Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane, “Movements, Magazines and Manifestos: The Succession from Naturalism”, in: *idem* (eds.), *Modernism 1890-1930*, Harmondsworth 1976, 192-205, here 204-5.

²² Astradur Eysteinnsson, “Does Modernism Work as a European Concept?”, in: Mats Jansson, Janna Kantola, Jakob Lothe and H.K. Riikonen (eds.), *Comparative Approaches to European and Nordic Modernisms*, Helsinki 2008, 17-32, here 27.

next critical step is to minimize if not sever this particular link, as for instance Martin Travers does in a book that came out some years ago:

The Avant-Garde represented the most radical and (some might say) the most progressive wing of literary Modernism. And yet the iconoclastic energies of its work had only a limited impact upon the major writers of this period, those whom we now regard as main-stream Modernists such as Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and W.B. Yeats, in England and Ireland; Marcel Proust and André Gide, in France; Thomas Mann, Robert Musil and Franz Kafka, in German-speaking Europe; and Italo Svevo, in Italy.²³

Here a critical wedge has been driven between the avant-garde and what is seen as mainstream modernism, and Travers goes on to use concepts such as “larger design”, “aesthetic totalities”, “patterns of meaning” and the “overcoming” of “dislocations” to designate the difference, the distinction of achieved modernism. (One of the things that interest me here, is the whole issue of *value* in such critical manoeuvres.)

Other scholars, in part because of their different background, wield this critical wedge differently. Matei Calinescu, in his book *Faces of Modernity* (later expanded and reissued as *Five Faces of Modernity*), responds to a 1972 review in the American journal *Boundary 2* of Renato Poggioli’s book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. The reviewer, Robert Langbaum, notes: “For *avant-garde* in the title read *modernism*. The late Professor Poggioli of Harvard means by avant-garde what most of us mean by *modernism*, and has in fact written what is probably the best book on modernism”.

Calinescu is not happy with this equation:

This equivalence is surprising and even baffling for a critic familiar with the Continental usage of the term avant-garde. In France, Italy, Spain and other European countries the avant-garde, despite its various and often contradictory claims, tends to be regarded as the most extreme form of artistic negativism – art itself being the first victim. As for modernism, whatever its specific meaning in different languages and for different authors, it never conveys that sense of universal and hysterical negation so characteristic of the avant-garde. The antitraditionalism of modernism is often subtly traditional. That is why it is so difficult, from a European point of view, to conceive of authors like Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Thomas Mann, T.S. Eliot, or Ezra Pound as representatives of the avant-garde. These writers have indeed very little, if anything, in common with such typically avant-garde movements as futurism, dadaism, or surrealism. So if we want to operate consistently with the concept of modernism (and apply it to such writers as those mentioned above), it is necessary to distinguish between

²³ Martin Travers, *An Introduction to Modern European Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*, Houndmills-London 1998, 106.

modernism and the avant-garde (old and new). It is true that modernity defined as a “tradition against itself” rendered possible the avant-garde, but it is equally true that the latter’s negative radicalism and systematic antiaestheticism leave no room for the artistic reconstruction of the world attempted by the great modernists.²⁴

While it is true that the “European point of view” and the concomitant use of the term avant-garde, pose a significant challenge to the concept of modernism, Calinescu’s Continental surprise is somewhat undermined by the fact that Poggioli was Italian and his book was in fact originally written in Italian and published in Italy. Even though he had moved to the States and was teaching there at a time when “modernism” was gradually gaining ground as the broad term for anti-traditionalist 20th-century writing, Poggioli clearly felt that the avant-garde was a more weighty term to designate this current in all its breadth – and he stuck to it when his book was translated in 1968. He is not the only critic to use the concept of the avant-garde in the same broad sense that many lend to modernism, particularly in English.

Poggioli’s avant-garde embrace is broad indeed, to the point of including Proust, whose writing may to some seem a far cry from the “hysterical” negation of the historical avant-gardes. In fact, there are no doubt those who might want to rely on Calinescu’s description to argue that Proust’s work is a prime example of the “artistic reconstruction of the world”, completely at odds with the destructive forces of the avant-garde. It is interesting to see how the debate here unveils the links between literary theory – the conceptual mapping of literary and aesthetic phenomena – and value. For we are here at the crossroads of aesthetics, (literary) history, interpretation, and value. We may seek to work descriptively, but our hermeneutic vision is rarely value-free, and as Barbara Herrnstein Smith notes in her book *Contingencies of Value*, evaluation is “always compromised, impure, contingent; altering when it alteration finds; bending with the remover to remove; always Time’s fool”.²⁵ She notes further that literary value is the “*product of the dynamics of a system*”,²⁶ one that our institutions have a tendency to reproduce – but also to manipulate according to the point of the investigation. And “manipulate” is not a dirty here.

²⁴ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitch, Postmodernism*, Durham 1987, 140-1. The Langbaum quote is on page 140 in Calinescu.

²⁵ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory*, Cambridge, Mass. 1988, 1.

²⁶ Smith, *Contingencies of Value*, 15 (emphasis in original).

In order to demonstrate how an investigation into the avant-garde can provide a point of view at odds with examples already mentioned, let me take a look at Richard Murphy's important book *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*; in fact I will jump right into the discussion where he says:

Modernism's conservative relationship to autonomy is thus deeply ingrained in the ideological make-up of its works in a variety of ways. The modernist work is wary firstly of that sense of ideological commitment characteristic of the avant-garde, since instrumentalization by a political cause or annexation by any particular interpretation of reality or "Weltbild" would risk encroaching upon its ambiguity and limiting its semantic horizons.²⁷

Later, in discussing Gottfried Benn's expressionist novella cycle *Gehirne*, Murphy traces the avant-garde elements that separate it from modernism.

What is it then that distinguishes Benn's text from modernism? To play devil's advocate for a moment we could view modernism as a vast extension of the aestheticist credo of "art for art's sake" – a position which had already been decisively rejected by the avant-garde. From this perspective the "classic" modernist innovations, such as the stream-of-consciousness technique and the liberation and radical manipulation of the categories of time and space, then appear merely as an updating of realism's technical virtuosity.²⁸

Murphy has here managed to send modernism with a single blow into the arms of *both* aestheticism *and* realism, stretching it, as it were, between the two as kind of backdrop against which the characteristics of the avant-garde are observed and appreciated. I want to stress that there is nothing inherently wrong with this procedure; this is one of the ways in which we work with, manipulate, juggle, concepts in the humanities; often playing them against one another in order to clear an interpretive space. In the case of Murphy, he is clearing space for expressionism, arguing why it is an important part of the European avant-garde (as opposed to Peter Bürger's evaluation of it in his famous *Theorie der Avant-Garde* – where it gets excluded from the central historical avant-gardes). In a recent, interesting article on radical narratives, Murphy has in fact brought modernism and the avant-garde together, again, and discusses narrativization (or antinarrativization) in the "modernist avant-garde", as he calls it.²⁹

²⁷ Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity*, Cambridge 1999, 30.

²⁸ Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, 107.

²⁹ Richard Murphy, "History, Fiction, and the Avant-Garde: Narrativisation and the Event", in: *Phrasis*, 1, 2007, 83-103, here 86.

Readerly Challenges

It is perhaps inevitable that modernism, if and when viewed from certain angles, will appear as the well-behaved, conservative, apolitical, form-conscious (or formally proper) sibling of the feisty avant-garde. It is interesting to note that such a dualism may ultimately come to look like Ihab Hassan's well-known dual list of the characteristics of modernism versus postmodernism – and now that postmodernism is on the wane, the avant-garde may perhaps step in and occupy the challenging roles some will claim it had all along.³⁰

<i>Modernism</i>		<i>Postmodernism (Avant-Garde?)</i>
Form (conjunctive/closed)	vs.	Antiform (disjunctive/open)
Purpose	vs.	Play
Design	vs.	Chance
Hierarchy	vs.	Anarchy
Creation/Totalization	vs.	Decreation/Deconstruction
Centering	vs.	Dispersal
Signified	vs.	Signifier
Lisible (readerly)	vs.	Scriptible (writerly)
Narrative	vs.	Anti-narrative

There is little doubt that the column on the right captures the scholarly excitement and interest – indeed, the work ethic – of recent years and decades in significant branches of literary studies and related fields more than the left column. And it is not hard to see how this, when played out, gets connected with ideology and value; not least the value of resisting the powers that be, dominant ideologies, centralization, conservative attitudes, grand narratives.

By the same token, however, one may question the value of placing modernism in a central position of cultural dominance, against which we rally the dispersed and anarchic forces of the avant-garde. This has no doubt happened because of the high visibility of modernism studies within academic disciplines, where, excuse the cheap pun, modernism is inevitably disciplined to some or even high degree. This is especially true

³⁰ Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism*, Ithaca-London 1990, 129. Full list in Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2nd ed., Madison 1982, 267.

for its most celebrated and canonized writers, whose fame has also spread to the more public realm, where *Ulysses* may even get voted as the novel of the 20th century. This may sound like a far cry from the grassroots activities of avant-garde groups or individuals who in relative obscurity struggle with basic questions, ground-level experiments, strange as they may sometimes appear to be. Yet, modernism and avant-garde studies must be able to cover this whole stretch, while also, in my view, seizing the enduring difference of the resistance characterizing the literature we call modernist or avant-garde. *Ulysses* may be a famous and celebrated novel, but it is (still) a strange novel in a way that has fundamental implications for modern culture.

My views in this matter are perhaps shaped by my translation work with Franz Kafka for several years. I am aware of the international processing of Kafka as writer, individual, icon and phenomenon, and I can see how that constitutes an interesting topic as such for a cultural studies approach. But primarily I meet Kafka at the aforementioned ground-level; in the kitchen and the hallways, where people, animals, sentiments, and consonants rub against one another in the most frightful way; where clarity coexists with confusion, as if nothing were more natural. Whoever translates Kafka has to “experiment” at a very basic level with the words and worlds he or she dissambles and reconstructs – and whoever does this also becomes acutely aware of the fact that this is the fate of every reader who wanders this way.

It is true, of course, that all understanding is a form of translation, but there is something different about these challenges to the reader and the way in which they connect with the reader’s world-imaging (or world-building, if you will). That is why I think Calinescu is misled when he claims that the radical avant-gardes “leave no room for the artistic reconstruction of the world attempted by the great modernists”. For perhaps the challenges to the modernist reader, as described for instance by Charles Altieri in a recent article,³¹ are not so different from all the unfinished business left for the receiver in so many avant-garde artworks and performances – the open spaces where the reader, viewer or listener is indeed challenged to fuse art with the praxis of life, to refer to a perennial topic in the avant-garde debate.

³¹ Charles Altieri, “Modernist Innovations: A Legacy of the Constructed Reader”, in: Astradur Eysteinnsson & Vivian Liska (eds.), *Modernism* (Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, Vol. XXI), Vol. 1 of 2, 67-86.

Tracing Terms

This is only one indication of why the interrelations between modernism and the avant-garde are such a vital issue – an issue which is still highly contentious – and one reason why Vivian Liska and I, as editors of the recent ICLA *Modernism* symposium, decided to place at the forefront of more than 60 contributions by 65 scholars from numerous countries, a terminological article by Edward Możejko, who specifically tackles this issue. Możejko is in a strong position to do this, because he is not only aware of how the two terms have been applied in North America and Western Europe, but is also thoroughly familiar with the relevant critical traditions in Central and Eastern Europe (which have often been overlooked in Anglo-American debates about modernism, even when they have sought to include some Continental, for instance French, examples). While Możejko points out that the two terms have to some extent been “determined by two distinct literary cultural traditions”,³² he still feels that, from a transnational comparative perspective, a concept is needed to cover a broad and extended historical literary period or epoch of aesthetic innovation and experimentation, one that is “composed of many artistic currents, national and international in scope”.³³ He suggests we use “modernism” in this broad sense – as many scholars have, of course, including the aforementioned Bradbury and McFarlane, as well as Peter Nicholls in his book on *modernisms* in the plural (which has since become standard practice)³⁴ – and it is this broad sense which is built into several theories of modernism, even when the term “modernism” is not explicitly used, as in Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*.

Możejko is certainly aware of “the practice in Western literary criticism of using the term modernism in relation to experimental literature of rather moderate bent which did not ignore the tradition of past artistic experience; the term avant-garde, on the other hand, was practically reserved for extreme artistic experiments, which called for breaking off (most often by noisy and iconoclastic manifestoes) with the legacy of past cultural achievements”. He suggests, following both English and Polish critics, that we use “classicism” or “new classicism” for modernism in this moderate sense and he goes on to argue that “modernism can be understood as a term denoting constant tension between these

³² Edward Możejko, “Tracing the Modernist Paradigm: Terminologies of Modernism”, in: Eysteinnsson & Liska (eds.), *Modernism*, 11-33, here 18.

³³ Możejko, “Tracing the Modernist Paradigm”, 28.

³⁴ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, London 1995.

two variants of the same artistic invariant”³⁵ and he points out how this tension can be observed in various countries and contexts, the dialogue between acmeism and futurism in Russia being a case in point (Mandelstam vs. Mayakovsky, as it were). Mozejko even goes as far as saying that “the very essence of modernism rests on the above-mentioned oppositions and tensions”³⁶ and in arguing for a critical synthesis via the term “modernism”, he points out that radical breakthroughs do not necessarily occur on the more radical side of this dual current; they emerge rather through an interaction between the two forces involved. His example is the working out of the “thing-poem” in Russia, which was a milestone in the opposition to the symbolist legacy.

Given all the historical differences in many locations, between the various groups and writers which would come under this rubric, I am very sympathetic to Mozejko’s argument for an umbrella term which will work, perhaps not universally, but at least for European and American cultural spheres (including Latin America of course), and which focuses on the dialogue and diacritical (dialectic, if you will) interaction between the two wings, resisting the critical wedge that some want to drive between them. Yet, I am hardly alone in having a problem with the term “classicism” in this context; perhaps *classical modernism* would serve better for what Pound famously called “making it new” – where “it” may be read as “the classic” or “tradition”.

Experiment in Stereo Poetics

There are obviously those who are unhappy with “modernism” as the general term; who feel perhaps that letting it subsume the avant-garde, constitutes an act of colonialization, and who further feel that there is a lot of baggage that comes with modernism, which may disrupt the focus on the avant-garde, which in turn is seen as having a life and history of its own. To some extent this is an issue of territorialism, with scholars and critics defending their institutional and conceptual turf (the two being almost one and the same, for we invest our scholarly capital in concepts as well as institutions). This is one reason why some avant-garde scholars try not to mention modernism in their work, and some modernism scholars act as if the avant-garde is outside their field, if not simply outside art.

But, acknowledging such institutional manifestations, we must still ask: is there a difference and where is it to be found? By asking “What’s

³⁵ Mozejko, “Tracing the Modernist Paradigm”, 20.

³⁶ Mozejko, “Tracing the Modernist Paradigm”, 22.

the difference?” we can keep people talking – it is vital to keep the channel open, to let messages through. As I see it, the difference is found but also questioned and possibly erased in aesthetic practice as manifested in various historical contexts, in texts and gestures, even in a single sentence, a word, a musical note, sometimes in silence.

I have recently been experimenting with two sets of parameters to try and work out the issues at hand, somewhat analogous to Možejko’s two-pronged modernism, except I’ve chosen to emphasize some of the prominent characteristics of modernism without seeing each of these two sets reflected in a particular movement or group, for they are not mutually exclusive – as Možejko in fact points out in his discussion of futurism and acmeism – and within a single movement we may also detect a similar bipolar tension, as Liska argues in the case of German expressionism.³⁷ I am all too aware of the risks and traps of any such mapping, but let me present a set of what I take to be key avant-garde elements:

parameters of avant-garde modernism (the avant-garde)

- ~ radical representation / the “shock” of the new
- ~ experiments / the unfinished work / foregrounding of work-in-progress
- ~ the movement element / group activity
- ~ the manifesto as genre and form of expression
- ~ the anti-aesthetic / anti-art / iconoclastic representation, radicalized to the point of erasing the border of art and other activities
- ~ revolt against art institutions (including the literary institution)
- ~ performance, both in the sense of live appearances and the focus on performative aspects in various genres and works
- ~ play (in the full ambiguity of that word), chance, disorder, chaos
- ~ revolution / utopian references (often parodic)
- ~ political representation / attacks on political institutions, dominant ideologies and discourses

Needless to say, there are all sorts of links between the various elements listed. No two scholars would put such a list of premises together in the same way, but those who vehemently insist on the separation of the avant-garde and modernism, would no doubt make their lists of the two contrast with one another. This is not what I had in mind when I put together the following list of elements of the more ‘moderate’ modernism, which I do not want to call “classicism” but for lack of a better term have temporarily named “classical” modernism.

³⁷ See Liska’s article in this book.

parameters of ‘classical’ modernism:

- ~ making it new / tradition as problematic, renegotiated sceptically but often enthusiastically
- ~ modern form, sometimes fragmentary, open, porous
- ~ aesthetics subverting historical and social representation and symbolic order
- ~ upheaval of language/discourse, manifested e.g. in linguistic excess/superabundance or minimalism of language or the medium/genre concerned
- ~ crisis of the subject (includ. crisis of sexuality, gender, race)
- ~ the inward turn (“invironment” vs. environment in realist texts) / exploration of consciousness and the subconscious
- ~ modern landscapes, the urban, technological world (but often via “invironment”)
- ~ negativity, anti-rationality (questioning premises of “common” sense; modern rationality runs into its “other”, into primitivism, myth ...)
- ~ hermeticism, obscurity

Some might simply want to call this second category modernist and the other one avant-garde – and together they would be “avant-garde and modernism”, on equal terms, as it were, as in the name of the new book series *European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies*. It was a wise decision to include both conceptual realms in the series. I actually find myself increasingly using the two terms jointly, making them rub up against one another.

This stereo approach may risk re-establishing the dichotomy of modernism versus the avant-garde, and the next hapless step might then be to use it to categorize works and aesthetic practices in a mutually exclusive fashion. But it should be obvious that my two lists overlap. There is no clear dividing line between the two. The difference is fluid, yet dynamic. And there are important elements missing that I could have included in both lists, such as concreteness or the “constructivist moment”, as Barrett Watten might call it, to refer to his fine book of that title.³⁸ Through the metalevel often implicit in that moment, there is also the whole issue of textual self-referentiality, which I could have included in both these lists.

This fluid difference, as I see it, often takes the form of reciprocity and dialogue rather than opposition and contrast. A single text is very often both modernist and avant-garde, even though the avant-garde elements may vary in their pronouncement. It is tempting to end by going back to Iceland to give you examples of this in post-World War Two Icelandic literature, in part because I am increasingly interested in the avant-garde and modernist activities of the second half of the 20th century, when modernism is already over, finished, according to some authorities.

³⁸ Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics*, Middletown 2003.

The seemingly “belated” breakthroughs of modernism in off-center locations can tell us a lot about the history of modernism and the avant-garde, its resurgence in different contexts, the way it is disseminated, translated, adapted, changed, the way its tradition-in-the-making is not left alone, or left to the universities (where the “modernist period” does not really take off until the post-World War Two period either) – but is, as the Brazilian poet, translator and scholar Haroldo de Campos puts it, “rewritten” and “rechewed” – his own work being of course a great example of such post-war activity, in which translation assumes a broad and powerful meaning).³⁹

But this would call for too much background information, so let me return, very briefly, to territories more familiar, that is, to some canonical modernist works. In literary studies, probably more than in art history and theory, there is a tendency to turn off the avant-garde loudspeaker when a work has been heavily canonized. Pound’s *Cantos* would be a case in point, not least the celebrated *Pisan Cantos*, seen by many as one of the key works of modernist poetry. But it is also an avant-garde work. Here is a quick look at a few lines from Canto 79:⁴⁰

the imprint of the intaglio depends
 in part on what is pressed under it
 the mould must hold what is poured into it
 in
 discourse
 what matters is
 to get it across e poi basta
 5 of ‘em now on 2;
 on 3; 7 on 4
 thus what’s his name
 and the change in writing the song books
 5 on 3 aulentissima rosa fresca
 so they have left the upper church at Assisi
 but the Goncourt shed certain light on the
 french revolution
 “paak you djeep oveh there”
 the bacon-rind banner alias the Washington arms
 floats over against Ugulino

辭
達

³⁹ Haroldo de Campos, “Anthropophagous Reason: Dialogue and Difference in Brazilian Culture”, in: Campos, *Novas: Selected Writings*, ed. and with an introduction by Antonio Sergio Bessa and Odile Cisneros, Evanston 2007, 157-77, here 177.

⁴⁰ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, London 1975, 486.

We can imagine someone arguing that the meta-linguistic references, the constructivist features, the polyphony, are all modernist, but they connect with avant-garde practices too, as does the strident political voice – here directed against Washington – and also, quite strikingly, the conceptual piece that Pound works into the canto here, where the birds he observes on the prison wires compose lines for him – “5 of ‘em now on 2; / on 3; 7 on 4” – as a kind of musical substratum; one cannot help but think of John Cage.

Or let us take the opening paragraph of Kafka’s *Amerika* (*Der Verschollene*), where the ship enters New York harbour and Karl Rossmann sees the Statue of Liberty with her sword held high – unequalled political modernism these past few years. This view of the statue is not corrected and at a “modernist” level of environment, one tends to read it as Karl’s distorted view, which then connects with other striking moments of perception and misconception in the novel. However, a reading with more of an avant-garde emphasis might link this passage to works like Duchamp’s reworking of Mona Lisa in his *L.H.O.O.Q.* (the avant-garde is not that averse to tradition after all ...). Both Kafka and Duchamp manipulate and distort iconic and symbolic female figures, but perhaps they are also declaring how passionate they are about them.

We could go on like this. There are avant-garde voices and elements in the *Waste Land* and *Ulysses*. Just think of Leopold Bloom’s musical performance in *Ulysses*: all you need for a concert is your rear end and a rubber band.

The Slovenian Interwar Literary Avant-Garde and Its Canonization

Marijan Dovič (Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts)

In 1984, one of the leading experts on the Slovenian historical avant-garde¹ started his survey with a powerful claim: “In his map of European avant-garde movements, according to which no avant-garde existed south of the Vienna-Budapest line, John Willet will have to include (among others) the Slovenian avant-garde with its specific features”.² Janez Vrečko’s statement, referring to Willet’s map from 1978,³ needs no further explanation: the existence of such an entity as “the Slovenian literary avant-garde” after World War One – to which he devoted much of his research efforts – is unquestionable, yet the problem is that it is not recognized outside the confines of national cultural and literary history, that it is mostly overlooked and unacknowledged. Therefore, the goal for Slovenian experts is simply to promote such an entity for it to become better included in the overall picture; namely, to help draw it *into* the European avant-garde map.

Today, a quarter of a century later, the frustration expressed by Vrečko is even more understandable, as the European literary avant-gardes have been seemingly carefully covered in several joint international studies. As a matter of fact, the situation in 1984, when Vrečko was writing (in Slovenian), may not have been so frustrating if one considers that Srečko Kosovel’s poetry has been familiar to French readers at least since 1965,⁴ and that in Weisstein’s *Expressionism as an International Literary*

¹ As in most other European regions, in the Slovenian context the term “historical avant-garde” refers to the pre-World War II period, whereas the avant-garde phenomena after that war are referred to as “neo-avant-garde”.

² Janez Vrečko, “Slovenska zgodovinska avantgarda”, in: *Obdobje ekspresionizma v slovenskem jeziku, književnosti in kulturi*, Ljubljana 1984, 399-409. My translation.

³ John Willet, *The New Sobriety 1917-1933: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period*, London 1978.

⁴ The eminent French poet and editor Marc Alyn introduced Kosovel in a substantial book: *Kosovel: bibliographie, portraits, fac-similés*, published in Paris by Pierre Seghers in 1965, as a part of the series *Poètes d'aujourd'hui* (Today’s poets). Alyn’s French publication, which

Phenomenon (1973) the Serbian literary comparatist Zoran Konstantinović briefly characterized some of the leading Slovenian expressionist poets.⁵ In his article “Expressionism and the South Slavs”, Konstantinović mentions not only Anton Podbevšek and Srečko Kosovel, who are usually referred to as avant-garde poets, but also includes Miran Jarc, Anton Vodnik, Tone Seliškar, and others. Furthermore, Zbigniew Folejewski’s (much disputed) *Futurism and its Place in the Development of Modern Poetry* (1980) not only includes three translated Slovenian “futurist” poets (Podbevšek, Kosovel, and Vladimir Premru) in the anthology section, but also a discussion on the genuine Slovenian contribution to the broader futurist movement in the main text.⁶ However, in Weisgerber’s synthetic *Les avant-gardes littéraires* (1986), in which the Slovenian avant-garde was supposed to be “covered” in the Yugoslavian section, Zoran Konstantinović omits the Slovenian avant-garde completely in favor of apparently more appealing topics, such as Croatian/Serbian zenitism or Serbian surrealism. In the bottom line, the two leading figures of Slovenian avant-garde poetry, Podbevšek and Kosovel, acknowledged as such unanimously in the national scholarly tradition, are not even mentioned in this ambitious survey.⁷ A somewhat different attitude would be expected from Cornis-Pope’s and Neubauer’s *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* (2003-2004), whose three massive volumes thoroughly discuss the avant-gardes in the region in several articles.⁸ Again, however, these offer no information about the Slovenian interwar avant-garde authors: Kosovel is mentioned in another context, and Podbevšek is not mentioned at all. Similarly, in Eysteinsson’s and Liska’s recent two volumes of *Modernism* (2007) both names are sought in vain.⁹

included some of Kosovel’s previously unpublished poems, had a significant impact in Slovenia. Following several German and Italian translations of Kosovel’s poetry from the 1970s onwards, three major projects in English also appeared in the last decade: *Integrals* (Ljubljana 1998), *Man in a Magic Square* (Ljubljana 2004) and *The Golden Boat: Selected Poems of Srečko Kosovel* (Cambridge 2008).

⁵ Zoran Konstantinović, “Expressionism and the South Slavs”, in: Ulrich Weisstein (ed.), *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*, Paris-Budapest 1973, 259-68.

⁶ Zbigniew Folejewski (ed.), *Futurism and its place in the development of modern poetry*, Ottawa 1980.

⁷ See Jean Weisgerber (ed.), *Les avant-gardes littéraires au XX^e siècle*, Vol. I-II, Budapest 1986.

⁸ Marcel Cornis-Pope & John Neubauer (eds.), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctions and Disjunctions in the 19th and 20th centuries*, Vol. I-III, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 2003 (I), 2004 (II, III).

⁹ Astradur Eysteinsson & Vivian Liska (eds.), *Modernism*, 2 vols., Amsterdam-Philadelphia 2007.

This introduction is by no means accidental. Such an initial situation, the “state of the art” (namely, that the Slovenian interwar literary avant-garde is not recognized as a specific entity outside the national cultural arena), is a *fact* that inevitably affects the possibilities of its discussion and presentation in international scholarly exchange.¹⁰ It definitely thwarts the intention of jumping directly into the subject and discussing the Slovenian avant-garde, and its texts, manifestations, topics, and figures. Instead, it redirects attention to other problems and stimulates thorough self-reflection. My intention is certainly not to propose any kind of “parliamentary” distribution of the avant-garde “seats” by a national or any other “quota” principle. Ignoring the Slovenian literary avant-garde in most cases cited above can be completely justified and legitimate – if there is a good reason behind it. Of course, this is an issue to be dealt with by Slovenian literary historians first, both in the regional (that is, Balkan and Central European) and broader European comparative contexts. Was the phenomenon referred to as “the Slovenian avant-garde” an avant-garde movement at all and is it comparable to others? How was this avant-garde influenced by other European currents and through which channels? In addition, how was it actually connected to them; were those connections one-way or mutual? Finally, what is the value of its artistic achievements? Most of these questions have been addressed seriously by Slovenian scholars, and in general the concepts of avant-gardism, modernity, and modernism have been discussed at a very high level in recent decades in the Slovenian humanities.¹¹

Quite obviously then, this is also a (rather unpleasant) issue for the international scholarly community when it professes an honest intention to capture the European avant-gardes as an interconnected whole or even define the European avant-garde in the singular form. Are such omissions of a “small” avant-garde deliberate, well-considered, and therefore legitimate, or are they simply due to ignorance, linguistic and cultural obstacles, and the automatisms and self-sufficiencies of great cultures and languages? It is impossible to expect all these questions to be answered in a single

¹⁰ This is true especially for Podbevšek.

¹¹ In the writings of Janko Kos, Janez Vrečko, Jola Škulj, and Marko Juvan in particular. See, along the other works of these critics mentioned in this article, among others: Marko Juvan, “Srečko Kosovel and the Hybridity of Modernism”, in: *Primerjalna književnost*, 28, special issue, 2005, 189-204; Janko Kos, *Primerjalna zgodovina slovenske literature*, Ljubljana 2001; Janko Kos, “K vprašanju o bistvu avantgarde”, in: *Sodobnost*, 18, 1980, 237-45, 361-70; Janez Vrečko, “Anton Podbevšek in slovenska zgodovinska avantgarda”, in: *Nova revija*, 3, 1984, 2446-56, 2750-9; and Janez Vrečko, “Srečko Kosovel and the European Avant-garde”, in: *Primerjalna književnost*, 28, special issue, 2005, 175-88.

essay, and it is not my intention to attempt this. For my own sake, however, posing these questions is the only possible way to frame the discussion on the Slovenian interwar literary avant-garde and its specific canonization process. As shall be seen, this canonization process has an obvious affinity with the questions raised above. Yet, the story of the revival (or rather, the “re-invention”) of the Slovenian avant-garde also opens up problems that are by no means only of local relevance.

Two Models of the Slovenian Literary Avant-Garde

The Slovenian interwar literary avant-garde is most often connected with the names of Anton Podbevšek (1898-1981) and Srečko Kosovel (1904-1926), the two poets usually considered to be its pioneers.¹² However, their sources of inspiration, their poetic credos, their ways of incorporating avant-garde ideas into poetry and their social life, and their fate in later canonization processes – all of these differ in such a way that justifies speaking of two distinct avant-garde models. Moreover, the extraordinary careers of both figures offer interesting insights into the canonization of the avant-garde movements and figures in general, not only in the Slovenian context.

For the purpose of my argumentation, I consider the avant-garde – as a fairly complex phenomenon – to be described *insufficiently* when a description restricts itself to the level of the text.¹³ Here I refer to Peter Bürger’s well-known suggestion in his *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974) that avant-gardism arose after the breakdown of the aesthetic ideal of autonomous art, which resulted in the tension to move aesthetics from art to life. The avant-garde artist *plays out* his subjectivity not only in the work, but in what the condition of this work is: his social existence and the modes of production, performing, programming, manifesting, and socializing. Even if one hesitates to go so far as to say that this is an attempt to apply “abso-

¹² In the early 1920s, Podbevšek strongly influenced poets such as Vladimir Premru and France Onič, his best known epigones. Several other names from the interwar art world figure as avant-garde, such as the composer Marij Kogoj, the constructivist visual artist Avgust Černigoj (and to some extent France Kralj, Tone Kralj, and Božidar Jakac), and the stage director Ferdo Delak. Together with Černigoj, Delak established *Novi oder* (The New Stage), most active in 1925 and 1926, and published two issues of the avant-garde magazine *Tank* in 1927.

¹³ Thus it does not seem sufficient to define a certain text as avant-garde because avant-gardism springs up in a complex interplay. Of course, the text remains relevant, but it does not always suffice. This dilemma is also reflected in the essential writings of Poggioli and Calinescu.

lute poetical metaphysics” in social practice (an avant-garde artist would then remain a “believer” in reaching the “freedom of the absolute subject” in the “praxis” of life), this interplay of *what* and *how* is highly interesting. Documents themselves urge us to approach the avant-garde not only at the level of products, but also at the level of social existence and actions of the artists, responses of the audience, provocations, and manifestos; to focus on groupings, para-literary practices, and struggles over consecration and symbolic capital.¹⁴

From this angle, both Podbevšek’s and Kosovel’s avant-gardism prove to be quite specific. Podbevšek only started his repercussive provocations at a time when he had already ceased writing poetry, when he ceased remaining “alive”, and was silent for decades after his withdrawal in the late 1920s. In contrast, Kosovel showed no obvious signs of avant-gardism in public during his short life, being recognized as an avant-garde poet much later on the basis of discovered texts.

Podbevšek: The Arrogant “Man with the Bombs” and His Soirées

Anton Podbevšek, born in the provincial southeastern town of Novo Mesto, tried to enter literature with a provocative attempt to publish *Žolta pisma* (Yellow Letters), a cycle of 24 short poems that he wrote as a high-school student in 1915, at the age of 16. The cycle was later labeled a Slovenian avant-garde manifesto. Here is one such “letter:”

Yellow Letters, V.

The eyes staring twentieth century of cadavers became aware of the hypnotism mechanism ...

The sparrows were cheeping: cheep ... cheep ... cheep ...

Church towers shadows of bipeds and quadrupeds: clip ... clop ... clip ...

Only God knows why: sixteen supernatural years hissed: sph ... inx ...¹⁵

The text is obviously modern, characterized by daring, illogical metaphors, loose syntax, omitted conjunctions and prepositions, and onomatopoeia. As a whole, the cycle turns out to be heavily inspired by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (1912); it reads almost as

¹⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford 2000.

¹⁵ My translation.

a *literal* implementation of its basic principles. Podbevšek perceived Marinetti's ideas through exhaustive reports in Slovenian literary magazines in this period, which were often scornful or mocking, but quite up-to-date.¹⁶ Even more striking than the text itself is Podbevšek's attitude: as an anonymous boy from the province trying to make his way into the distinguished magazine *Ljubljanski zvon* (The Ljubljana Bell), he enclosed a cover letter in which he claimed, in his later typically presumptuous style, that he belonged to the "most modern current", commented self-confidently on his own innovations, and added some "advice" to the editor to boot.

It hardly comes as a surprise that Podbevšek's first attempt was decisively rejected; *Yellow Letters* remained unpublished until 1972. Podbevšek was later called up as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and it was only after his return from the thrilling experience of the Isonzo Front and the Battle of the Piave River in 1917 and 1918 that he was able to continue pursuing his unusual artistic career. Podbevšek published his poetry in literary magazines from 1919 to 1922 and shocked and divided the public with long, ecstatic poems in free verse, with an incredibly egocentric lyrical subject, influenced by Whitman and Nietzsche, using innovative typographic conventions and montage techniques adopted from futurism and other avant-gardes.¹⁷ In fact, his only poetry collection *Človek z bombami* (The Man with the Bombs, published in Ljubljana in 1925) was already finished in 1919, and when he actually came out as the leader of a new generation in great style in the fall of 1920,¹⁸ he was already mute as a poet.

Obviously, Podbevšek's avant-garde activities in the early 1920s were no longer connected to the production of "artworks", which makes it possible to observe them at a strictly social level. Here, they turn out to be exemplary. Podbevšek's radical avant-garde position was fully and provocatively manifested in his para-textual strategies, his (public) manners of presenting himself, and his ideas. For a short period of time, Podbevšek

¹⁶ Especially influential were the articles on Italian futurism such as Gruden's detailed article, "L'Italia futurista", in: *Dom in svet*, 26, 1913, 333-7, 377-81, 413-5, 453-6. For the young Podbevšek, these reports were his main source of inspiration.

¹⁷ His main ally was *not* the liberal magazine *Ljubljanski zvon* (The Ljubljana Bell), but the Catholic-oriented *Dom in svet* (Home and World); in the early 1920s the Catholic cultural faction was actually more open to the avant-garde. Podbevšek also published a few poems in Miroslav Krleža's *Plamen* (The Flame, issued in Zagreb), *Kres* (The Bonfire) and *Trije labodje* (The Three Swans).

¹⁸ Here I refer to the events of the "Novo mesto Spring" (*Novomeška pomlad*) in September and its "reprise" in Ljubljana in November 1920.

became an “urban legend” of Ljubljana: a “Titan”, strongly influenced by Nietzsche’s “Übermensch”, a man of demonic energy, needing a revolver to defend himself from fierce enemies,¹⁹ an often offensive arbiter of cultural affairs, an arrogant judge of his colleagues’ works, and an organizer of provocative literary events, called “soirées”. His reading events and theoretical “lectures” include typical avant-garde features such as deliberately provoking the audience, scandals, innovative and “bombastic” advertising, and collective actions, all of which caused a very strong polarization of the public sphere and astonishing engagement of the media.²⁰

In his egotistic endeavors, Podbevšek might have gone too far. After his clash with two coeditors of *Trije Labodje* (The Three Swans), the critic Josip Vidmar, and the avant-garde composer Marij Kogoj, and after his turn to radical anarcho-leftist political positions with his unsuccessful magazine *Rdeči pilot* (The Red Pilot) in 1922, Podbevšek began losing literally all of his allies – one by one. When his “horrible” *The Man with the Bombs*, a collection that daringly exposed the critical process against its author on the covers, was finally published in 1925 (after four years of fruitless attempts with publishers, it was issued by his wife), Podbevšek’s star was already on the wane. After the final provocations in 1927, he withdrew from the public life, remaining in the shadows till his death in 1981.

Interest in the forgotten and silent Podbevšek was revived after World War Two, first by the writings of Vladimir Bartol, whose essays in the early 1950s developed the theory of the “historical dead angle” that befell Podbevšek’s poetry.²¹ Soon, the question of Podbevšek’s avant-gardism attracted literary historians, and in the 1950s the question of his supposed surrealist writing technique was raised by Petre, who speculated that Podbevšek might have been a precursor of European surrealism – independently from the French model and prior to it.²² This interest only grew in the period of the neo-avant-gardes, and in 1972 the first monograph on Podbevšek and his poetry was written by Katarina

¹⁹ Many anecdotes belong to the rich “oral tradition”, such as that of a tram that stopped when Podbevšek crossed the street. Some of them, such as the “revolver” story, were launched by Podbevšek himself much later.

²⁰ Again, his familiarity with the Italian and Russian models of public performing was mediated through reports in magazines.

²¹ Bartol’s exceptional historical novel *Alamut*, based on the medieval fundamental Muslim sect of Ismailism, was first published in 1937 and is now well known outside Slovenia.

²² Fran Petre, “Podbevškov problem”, in: *Naša sodobnost*, 7-8, 1956, 674-92. Petre’s hypothesis, as might be expected, has never been considered outside the Slovenian scholarly community.

Šalamun-Biedrzycka.²³ From then on, many papers were written, symposia took place, and Podbevšek's poems were reprinted and finally published in an electronic critical edition in 2007. Many activities have taken place in Podbevšek's hometown of Novo mesto, which retained its reputation of an avant-garde city, invoking the movements in 1920 known as the "Novo mesto Spring" as a symbolic reference point. Finally, this led to the establishment of the professional Anton Podbevšek Theatre in 2006, a daring institution explicitly attached to the tradition of Podbevšek's avant-garde and its "bombastic" imagery.

Kosovel: The Construction of an Avant-Garde Poet

Srečko Kosovel was born six years later than Podbevšek in the village of Tomaj, in the poetic Karst region, close to the Adriatic Sea and Trieste, the Habsburg Empire's main harbor. He grew up in what is now southwest Slovenia, a territory that was annexed to Italy after World War One. At the time of his early death in 1926, Kosovel was not considered an avant-garde poet, but a sensitive melancholy poet of the Karst or, at the most, a visionary of social revolution. It was only after some strikingly radical poems, which he called *konsi* ('conses'/'constructions') and *integrali* ('integrals'), several paper collages, and a manuscript manifesto *Mehanikom!* (To the Mechanics!) were found among the unsorted papers from his estate that his name also became connected with the avant-garde. Kosovel's poetry in his third, "constructivist" phase, written mostly in 1925 and 1926, changes from a silent lyricism into a loud, presumptuous, revolting poetry full of linguistic innovations, free of syntax and logical order, employing typographical aesthetics, styles and colors, mathematical symbols, internal monologue, and stream of consciousness. The heavily interpreted "Kons. 5" soon became an emblem of Kosovel's avant-gardism:

Kons. 5

Dung is gold
and gold is dung.
Both = O
O = ∞
∞ = O
A B < 1, 2 3

²³ Katarina Šalamun-Biedrzycka, *Anton Podbevšek in njegov čas*, Maribor 1972.

He who has no soul
needs no gold
he who has a soul
needs no dung.
EE-AW.²⁴

The sources of Kosovel's stunning work in this phase have been studied very carefully. His familiarity with Russian constructivism was quite likely mediated in great part through *Zenit*, the leading avant-garde magazine in the region published from 1921 to 1926 in Zagreb and later in Belgrade by the eccentric Ljubomir Micić, a self-proclaimed "Balkan barbarogenius" who managed to maintain a mutual exchange with great European avant-garde centers. Kosovel's reception of constructivism was therefore filtered through the picture he was receiving in *Zenit* and in part also in Slovenian magazines.²⁵ The examples in *Zenit*, the futurist poetics filtered through other avant-gardes, and the poetry of Micić, his brother Branimir (a.k.a. Virgil Poljanski), and Iwan Goll probably served as an inspiration to Kosovel to shape his constructivist "integrals" – which is far more probable than believing he was in direct contact with the Russian visual or literary avant-garde.²⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that Kosovel's avant-gardism – in sharp contrast to Podbevšek's – is only played out at the textual level. Kosovel's own career is virtually completely void of external, social signs of avant-gardism. Moreover, during his short life Kosovel kept his experiments to himself; he seldom showed them and did not try to publish them, even when he had the chance and took over the leadership of the magazine *Mladina* (Youth) with a group of leftist intellectuals in 1925.

In order to understand Kosovel's transformation into an *icon* of Slovenian avant-gardism – and several recent events confirm that this is exactly

²⁴ Translated by Nike Kocijančič Pokorn (Srečko Kosovel, *Integrals*, Ljubljana 1998, 95). "Cons. 5", one of Kosovel's best known "conses", was first published posthumously only in 1967 (in Srečko Kosovel, *Integrali* '26, Ljubljana 1967, 130, 131, and cover). In contrast to Podbevšek's works, Kosovel's poetry has been translated into many languages.

²⁵ See Janez Vrečko, *Srečko Kosovel, slovenska zgodovinska avantgarda in zenitizem*, Maribor 1986, Drago Bajt, *Ruski literarni avantgardizem*, Ljubljana 1981, and Lado Kralj, *Ekspressionizem*, Ljubljana 1986.

²⁶ Janko Kos, *Primerjalna zgodovina slovenske literature*, Ljubljana 2001. *Zenit* 17/18, for example, is wholly dedicated to "the new Russian art" and contains poetry by Mayakovsky, Chlebnikov, Aseyev, and Ehrenburg, as well as Malevich's essay "On New Systems in Art" and an article on the new Russian art by Ehrenburg and El Lissitzky. For more on *Zenit*, see Delphine Bière-Chauvel's article in this book.

what he has become²⁷ – it is first necessary to see what happened to his large and chaotic estate. Kosovel left over one thousand poems in manuscript, completely disorganized. Only few very moderate texts were published by Kosovel in magazines before 1926.²⁸ Afterwards, due to his early death, the canonization process went on in the *complete absence* of the author. The editions of 1927 (*Pesmi* ‘Poems’) and 1931 (*Izbrane pesmi* ‘Selected Poems’) contained only traditional poetry, and after World War Two, when Kosovel was the first author to appear in the prestigious edition *Zbrana dela slovenskih pesnikov in pisateljev* (Collected Works of Slovenian Poets and Writers) in 1946, some of the most radical “conses” were still left out. The editor Anton Ocvirk in fact hesitated about certain manuscripts: were they poems or unfinished fragments, sketches or brilliant avant-garde ideas?²⁹ Eventually, the problematic texts were published as *Integrals* ’26 in 1967, edited by Ocvirk and carefully designed by a prominent Slovenian visual artist, Jože Brumen.³⁰ The book shocked the public: where had these poems, “the best” of this Slovenian modernist and avant-garde writer, been all this time? A group of Slovenian poets found a contemporary in Kosovel, the founder of their poetics in retrospect, a “missing link” in Slovenian literary history.

The finger was pointed at Ocvirk, who had “held back” the manuscripts for all those years. This finger, however, somehow missed the point. In fact, all of the editorial interventions were *totally arbitrary* in any case. The editors constructed, and even produced, their own Kosovel. His heterogeneous opus, soaking up influences from all kinds of literary trends and movements, permitted diametrically opposed constellations of aesthetic and ideological preferences. Therefore the history of Kosovel’s canonization is a history of editorial appropriations: before World War Two, Kosovel was a national poet who had established the imagery of the Karst region as the “Slovenian imagery” – at a time when his village of Tomaj was deep inside Italy. The postwar Kosovel could adopt the state-approved face of a revolutionary socialist and sympathizer of the working class. With the flourishing of the neo-avant-garde art in Slovenia, Kosovel was actually made an avant-garde poet.

²⁷ Many streets and cultural, as well as other institutions bear Kosovel’s name. His poetry is being reprinted, generally using graphic designs that associate Kosovel with visual constructivism. His canonical status has already been exploited for advertising purposes.

²⁸ These poems were mostly published in marginal publications, but some of them also in the more influential *Dom in svet*, *Ljubljanski zvon*, and *Mladina*.

²⁹ Anton Ocvirk, “Srečko Kosovel in konstruktivizem”, in: Kosovel, *Integrali* ’26, 5, 112.

³⁰ Some of them were already included in Alyn’s 1965 French edition.

By the time *Integrals* '26 was published in 1967, the Slovenian neo-avant-gardes had acquired legitimacy and become part of a certain historical continuity. However, the volume *Integrals* '26 in itself is not a kind of innocent belated publication: it is once again an arbitrary choice, with an arbitrary, possibly even flawed title, accompanied by a graphic design that is far from neutral because it associates Kosovel very closely with the avant-garde context of the period when the book was published – through its heavily accentuated constructivist imagery. In this sense, the story of *Integrals* is related to a chronologically specific interpretation that is ideologically motivated. In this respect, the often-thematized question of the historical avant-garde in relation to Kosovel can in a way be seen as an artificial one, created in hindsight by literary history to demonstrate the synchronicity of Slovenian and European literary movements.

Conclusion: Re-Inventing the Avant-Garde

The Slovenian interwar avant-garde poetry as represented in the works of Podbevšek and Kosovel undoubtedly sprang from the same sources as the European contemporary avant-gardes in general. It was specific in many respects, but it was not really “belated”. Whereas Kosovel manifestly lacks the crucial social component of avant-gardism and has been constructed as an avant-garde poet *in absentia*, Podbevšek’s works and practices, fully in accord with the idea of an avant-garde author, must be seen as the real *nucleus* of the historical avant-garde in Slovenian literature. This is even more evident considering the fact that Podbevšek’s provocations had similar structural effects in the cultural field as those of Italian or Russian futurists and other European avant-garde formations.

From this point of view it seems rather difficult to explain the obvious discrepancy between the great amount of attention devoted to the avant-garde and its authors in Slovenia and the dead silence in international surveys. In a large part, this silence might be explained by the fact that neither Podbevšek nor Kosovel had any international links or mutual contacts with other European movements and centers. Podbevšek’s few attempts to connect with the more propulsive *Zenit* circle in Zagreb failed, and neither of his short-lived avant-garde magazine projects, *The Three Swans* or *The Red Pilot*, had any international background. As shown above, Kosovel did not *act* as an avant-garde artist even in Slovenia. Podbevšek and Kosovel’s connection to the European avant-garde was therefore more or less one-way, and their works in a small, autarkic community had no echoes that crossed national frontiers – a simple fact that is, of course, not related to the aesthetic value of their works. However, the fact that a

specialized, narrow context and perspective (that is, Balkan, Yugoslav, or Central European) is obviously needed to make such small avant-gardes *visible* at all might also be due to other problems, such as ignoring small cultures, cultural colonialism, and the obvious lack of symmetry in the formation of transnational canonical structures – highly relevant issues that have been fiercely discussed in contemporary comparative studies.³¹

The Slovenian endeavors described above, to reinvent the avant-garde and canonize its main figures, can at least partly be seen exactly as opposing or resisting the situation that Slovenian scholars felt pushed into – namely, being only influenced in a one-way direction and always *belated*. The shift that brought the question of the Slovenian historical avant-garde to the center of focus was obviously motivated by tendencies to “validate” the association of Slovenian literature with broader European movements and to legitimize its later avant-garde manifestations. A key topic in the discussion of the historical avant-garde was whether Slovenian literature had been “fully and actively engaged” in contemporary cultural events in Europe, or whether it had been underdeveloped, truncated, and blocked. Clearly, the enthusiasm about the avant-garde sprang in part from efforts to validate both the neo-avant-gardes, as well as from the much older, 19th-century nationalist impulse of literary (and cultural) history, which needs to prove the flexibility and creativity of national culture. Apart from that, the imaginary of the Slovenian historical avant-garde was heavily promoted by the postmodern retro-garde (for example, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*), which managed to become an influential European artistic formation after the emancipation of Slovenia.

However, there might be another matter at stake regarding the recent revival of the avant-garde. The explanation above may well be too short especially because this is by no means only a local, Slovenian symptom – the consecration of events, persons, and works that in their time played minor roles and were mocked and overridden by the mainstream is only its “external” aspect. New editions and exhibitions, establishing avant-garde theater, and especially new artworks and projects that lean on the avant-garde legacy, are all signs that a certain *spirit* of the avant-garde, a savage creativity that does not care for the rules, might have a source that transgresses all historically contingent reasons which brought it into existence. Interest in the avant-garde very often tends to exceed the level of sole “historical” interest, and awakens a certain level of involvement, of *personal* engagement. This surprising effect is due to the specific nature of the avant-garde revolt – its self-sufficiency and ignorance of the pragma-

³¹ In the works of Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, and David Damrosch, for example.

tism of results; the seed of rebellion, a call for radical renovation of the world, which does not even need a chance of any success, as Alain Badiou points out in his reflection on avant-gardism in *The Century*.³² The renewed fascination with the avant-garde shows that its creative and transgressive spirit may not be over yet, and that its time may come again.

³² Alain Badiou, *The Century*, tr. Alberto Toscano, Cambridge 2007.

Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde

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Art since 1900, a study published recently by several prominent art historians connected with the *October* quarterly, is definitely one of the best available overviews of 20th-century art.¹ The ample artistic material covered in the book has been ordered chronologically decade by decade, with each year approached in terms of its major events presented not so much as autonomous incidents, but as aspects of the intellectual processes characteristic of a given period. In a few instances the historical narrative is interrupted by “round table” debates among the authors. The analyses adopt the most recent methods of research, in many cases developed by the authors themselves. Moreover, each segment of the book has been supplemented by an appropriate reading list and crossreferences to other parts, which offer the reader a chance to follow specific artistic processes, series of events, as well as the evolution of individual artists – “above”, as it were, the subsequent narrative pieces. The book closes with a glossary of 20th-century art, an index, and an enormous bibliography. All in all, *Art since 1900* is an excellent textbook to be used at an academic level, virtually indispensable for the study of 20th-century art; perfectly clear and written in the present idiom of art history. The question which I am going to raise here pertains, however, to geography.

There is absolutely no doubt that *Art since 1900* is a textbook focusing on Western art – the art produced in the cultural and political centers of the West: Paris, Berlin, Vienna, London, New York, and others. This does not mean, though, that no examples of the art created outside the West or on its margins are mentioned. Apart from Russia and the role of Moscow and St. Petersburg (or Petrograd), the reader will find information on selected problems of 20th-century art in Brazil, Mexico, and Japan, as well as in Central, Southern and Northern Europe. It is perhaps the first

¹ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, London 2004.

publication affording such a wide scope and expanding the artistic geography of the last century. This is particularly important, since it is intended as an academic textbook.

The problem is, however, that *Art since 1900* does not revise the tacit assumptions of modernist artistic geography and that it ignores the perspective of critical geography² as well as what Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann calls “geohistory”.³ As a result it fails to reveal the historical significance of the space and place where specific art works were actually produced. In other words, *Art Since 1900* refuses to deconstruct the relations between the center and the margins in the world history of modern art. The group of art historians to which the authors of this book used to belong has done much to revise the paradigm of art historical studies, founding their project of a critical art history on inspiration drawn from social sciences, feminism, queer theory, etc. Still, the authors of *Art Since 1900* have made no attempt to critique the modernist artistic geography and have not revised its premises in their own critical methodology. Consequently, the art produced outside the centers of Western Europe and the United States are described within, as it were, the Western paradigm.

The main exception in this context is the case of Russia whose influence on the development of the worldwide (Western) avant-garde cannot be overrated and whose role has been distinctly highlighted in the book. This is, however, nothing new, as the history of the first, great Russian avant-garde has been part of the Western canon of 20th-century art at least since the times of Alfred Barr. Hence, its inclusion in any historical narrative is not so much an innovation as simply an obligation. The arts from other peripheral regions, however, are presented as fragments of the global or universal art history established in the West, which reveals both this book’s West-centric approach to art history, and the dominance of the premises of modernist art geography in general.

These premises add up to a type of art historical narrative which I call “vertical”. This vertical narrative implies a certain hierarchy. The heart of modern art is the center – a city or cities – where the paradigms of the main artistic trends came into being: Berlin, Paris, Vienna, London, New

² Critical geography is an approach opposed to traditional *Kunstgeographie*, understood as an essential concept of relationship between place and culture (*Blut und Boden*); critical geography, thus, along with other critical discourses (e.g. feminism, cultural studies etc.), destabilizes the relation between the subject and place, and recognizes it as a construction.

³ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art*, Chicago-London 2004; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, “Introduction”, in: Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Elizabeth Philiod (eds.), *Time and Place: Essays in the Geohistory of Art*, London 2005.

York. From those centers particular models come to the periphery, radiating all over the world. Put differently, from within certain nations those models are subsequently internationalised. Hence, the art of the center determines a specific paradigm, while the art of the periphery is supposed to adopt the models established in the centers. The center provides canons, hierarchy of values, and stylistic norms – it is the role of the periphery to adopt them in a process of reception. It may happen, of course, that the periphery has its own outstanding artists, but their recognition, or art historical consecration, depends on the center: on exhibitions organized in the West and books published in Western countries. That was what happened to the outstanding Polish constructivists, Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, and to Czech surrealists such as Toyen and Jindřich Štyrský. Naturally, their contemporaries recognized them as their peers – for instance, in his lecture given on March 29, 1935 in Prague, André Breton said that surrealism was developing in Paris and in Prague in two parallel ways.⁴ Significantly, then, the artists of the international avant-garde did not view the art scene from a vertical perspective: to the dadaists, Bucharest or Tokyo were no less important than Berlin or Zurich. It was only art history which developed the hierarchical, vertical discourse ordering the artistic geography in terms of centers and peripheries. To refer to dadaism once again, let me mention the excellent history of dada edited by Stephen Foster: among its several volumes, volume four provides information on whatever appeared outside the (Western) centers. The title of this volume is quite telling: *The Eastern Dada Orbit*. In this volume one finds the accounts of the dada movement in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as in Japan,⁵ which, strikingly, implies that whatever is outside the center is “Eastern”, the East apparently stretching from Prague to Tokyo. It would thus seem that vertical art history implies an “orientalization” of the culture of Others in the sense proposed by Edward Said.⁶

In world art history one can find some successful attempts to create alternative narratives that more aptly bring into scope the history of

⁴ See František Šmejkal, “From Lyrical Metaphors to Symbols of Fate: Czech Surrealism in the 1930s”, in: Jaroslav Anděl et al. (ed.), *Czech Modernism, 1900-1945*, Houston 1989, 65-83, here 65.

⁵ Stephen C. Foster (ed.), *Crisis and the Arts. The History of Dada*, Vol. IV: Gerald Janecek and Toshiharu Omuka (eds.), *The Eastern Dada Orbit: Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Central Europe, and Japan*, New York 1998. Of course there are some other studies focusing on Eastern Europe in particular as a place of the origins of dada movement. See, for instance, Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East. The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, Cambridge, Mass. 2006.

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1979.

modern art in the margins. One of these, conceived not in terms of a single case study but as an overview of a large non-Western area, is John Clark's *Modern Asian Art*.⁷ Clark has drawn a detailed picture of modern art in Asia in relation to the culture of the West, which he calls "Euramerica", and has noted little knowledge of his subject matter in the West. This lack of knowledge does not, however, stem merely from the differences in the cultural policies of specific countries, but from much more profound cultural processes going on in particular locations. In fact, Clark claims, the "Euramerican" influence is only one element which a historian interested in the region must take into consideration. Another element is the inner dynamics of a given culture, its selective needs to adopt specific models, and the role played by cultural "transfers" in particular countries. In other words, Clark is interested not so much in the reflection of Western modern art in Asia, but rather in the ways in which that art and its institutions are made to function in a given Asian context. Paradoxically, a Western art style is very often used as an instrument of resistance against the cultural colonialism and imperial domination of the West in different forms of neo-traditionalist art, which makes the picture of the local situation even more complicated. The same goes for the differentiation of art and the rise of local schools of "Western style". Clark's view is thus a much more dynamic conception of the reception of modern art in Asia than the ones usually found in Western textbooks of art history. According to Clark, the artist, the work, and the culture of a given country should be seen as "actors" rather than "fields" in which Western influences appear.⁸ Actors rather than fields: this metaphorical shift goes to the core of the issue I wish to address here.

However, in terms of the "orientalization" of the Other and its art history, successfully deconstructed by Clark, the positioning of the non-Western, or non-European, differs a lot from that of Central or Eastern Europe. The non-European "Other" is a real "Other", while the Central or Eastern European Other is a "not-quite-Other" or a "close Other".⁹ This, of course, has not always been so, as evidenced in a study by Larry Wolff, which illustrates that to the people of the Enlightenment someone from Eastern Europe (a Lithuanian, a Pole or a Russian) still seemed a

⁷ John Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, Honolulu 1998.

⁸ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 22.

⁹ The term "close Other" is used by Bojana Pejić in her essay "The Dialectics of Normality", in: Bojana Pejić and David Elliott (eds.), *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, Stockholm 1999, 116-28, here 120. She mentions Boris Groys (*fremde Nähe*), but makes no bibliographic reference.

“real Other” indeed.¹⁰ In modern culture, however, the place of the “close Other” is on the margins of European culture, outside the center but still within the same cultural frame of reference, while the place of the “real Other” is determined not by the strategy of marginalization, but by that of colonization.

The problem with the arts in the marginalized regions of Europe, in comparison to the other, non-Western parts of the world, especially after 1945, is that they remained somehow *in* Europe. Although they were dominated by the Soviet Union, they remained European, though their contact with the arts of the West was quite difficult; the artists remained European, though they hardly enjoyed the freedom of traveling from country to country, especially on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Consequently, writing from the “vertical” perspective, art historians were for a long time unable to reveal the meanings of the artistic culture in East-Central Europe, which developed in different ways in specific countries, although, for instance, geographically East Berlin was located just steps away from the West. In order to write a history of the arts of the region, historians were forced to focus on the political context of the reception of Western art models, which often radically changed their original meaning: *informel* meant something else in Poland than in France, a happening had other meanings in Czechoslovakia than in the US, and conceptual art in Hungary was not the same as conceptual art in the United Kingdom. Context-building, a sort of “framing” in the sense given to this term by Norman Bryson,¹¹ therefore became an indispensable element of the analytical expertise of the art historian in this part of Europe. Historical differences and a strong pressure of politics on art, regardless of its direct influences (paradoxically, such a pressure often resulted in radical depoliticization of art), may as such ultimately provoke the thesis, to quote Hans Belting, of the “two voices of the history of European art”.¹² One voice, according to Belting, is Western art history, the second one is Eastern European. Still, if this postulate is taken too literally, it may lead to errors in the interpretation of historical processes, that is, misunderstanding, interpretation outside the contextual, historical or geographical premises.¹³

¹⁰ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Stanford 1994.

¹¹ Norman Bryson, “Art in Context”, in: Ralph Cohen (ed.), *Studies in Historical Change*, Charlottesville 2003, 18-42, here 21.

¹² Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, Chicago-London 2003, 61.

¹³ See Mária Orišková, *Dvojhlásné dejiny umenia*, Bratislava 2002.

However, and quite significantly, although the meanings of art in East-Central Europe were different from those in the West, art in East-Central Europe kept developing within the orbit of Western culture. What is more, aspirations to remain part of Western culture played the role of a political remedy against the official cultural policies of the communist regimes, since the communists wanted to keep East European culture outside Western influences, and within the allegedly self sufficient Eastern Bloc.¹⁴ Therefore, the task is not to provide the “other voice of art history” (that is, Belting’s non-Western voice, from Eastern or Central Europe), but to establish another paradigm of writing art history.

The “horizontal” history of the European avant-garde, which I will propose presently, may well provide that other paradigm. I would like to sketch its basic principles (some of which are widely used already today). A horizontal art history should begin with the deconstruction of vertical art history, that is, the history of Western art. A critical analysis should reveal the speaking subject: who speaks, on whose behalf, and for whom? This is not to cancel Western art history, but to call this type of narrative by its proper name, precisely as a “Western” narrative. In other words, I aim to separate two concepts which have usually been merged: the concept of Western modern art and the concept of universal art. Western art history can thus be relativized and placed next to other art historical narratives – in accordance with the horizontal paradigm. The consequence of such a move will be a reversal of the traditional view of the relationship between the art history of the margins and that of “our” art history (read: of the West).

While it seems obvious that the modern art of the margins developed under the influence of the West, it appears much less obvious to ask how the developments in non-Western art affected the history of Western art or, more precisely, the perception of Western art. Here, then, a question arises: how does marginal art change the perception of the art of the center? How is the center perceived, not from the center itself – the place usually occupied by the historian of modern art – but from a marginal position?

For starters, the marginal observer sees that the center is cracked. If the center perceives itself as homogeneous, then the periphery, in the process of its reception and transformation of the center for its own use, will spot inner tensions which are, as it were, essential. It would seem that there are two categories which homogenize art history written from the

¹⁴ Piotr Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jalty. Sztuka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945-1989*, Poznań 2005.

point of view of the center: the canon, and the style, in the sense of given art movements, such as cubism and futurism. The history of the art of the margins, defined both in terms of artistic events, and in terms of their description and analysis, has been developing in the context of the Western canon and stylistics. First artists, and then art historians, refer in their creative and analytical experience to those categories. The Western canon of a given movement becomes a point of reference for its reception and transformation in specific locations outside the center. This is, however, not so much a question of judgment, but rather a historical frame, a context for more or less autonomous operations which, under the pressure of many local circumstances, generate their own hierarchies and canons. Such local art canons cannot be agreed upon, since there is no single history of the art of the margins. There are as many histories as there are margins. Still, such histories can be negotiated, particularly from the critical perspective of a common opposition to the center. If, however, the canon emerges as relative when seen from the margins, the conclusion may well be that it should also be relativized in the center. Art historians should realize that a canon is always an effect of an analytical and historical construction – more dependent on the historian than on the art accounted for. This holds even more true when it comes to style. In fact, the art of the margins and its histories never accepted the Western “purity” of style. There are plenty of examples – Russian cubo-futurism (its very name marks it as heterogeneous), Hungarian activism, Polish formism and Moscow conceptual art, to mention just a few – and the conclusions to be drawn from them are quite obvious. Returning to the center with the experience of the margins, we realize that for instance conceptual art in the West was not so orthodox or homogeneous either, and that the linguistic model as an analytical category derived from the activity of the *Art and Language* group does not include a number of manifestations. In short, the art history of the center, as well as the global history of modern art developed from it, have the opportunity to revise their self-perception as a result of studies focused on the margins, informed by a horizontal history of the avant-garde.

Relativization of Western art history in consequence of, among other procedures, the deconstruction of its analytical and geographical categories, as well as the “localization” of the center, must bring about similar processes in marginal art history. The latter must also take a fresh look at itself, define its position, and the place from which it speaks. In fact, its position is much more privileged in this respect than that of the historian placed in the center. Due to the ideology of the universalism of modern art, the historian of the center, often quite unconsciously, tends to ignore the significance of place, thus becoming an instrument of colonization. In

his or her opinion, if art is universal, the place from which it speaks does not matter. The (close) Other, much more sensitive to context and quick to realize the importance of “relational geography”,¹⁵ can make us aware that we do not write our statements in the middle of nowhere, but in specific locations. After all, the center is also just a place with specific local legal, ethnic, and cultural parameters. The subject occupying the center tends to forget that it is situated there, in a place precisely located on the map of the world. The Other, or for our purposes the so-called close Other, who cannot forget His own location, can provide the historian of the center with self-consciousness. A historian of modern Czech or Romanian art knows very well where he or she is, while a historian of modern art in France or the United States often ignores this and thus tends to universalize the merely local.

Here we reach the key problem of horizontal art history, which is the problem of localization. If we take a look at books on the history of modern art, it is evident that we are faced either with what is presented as simply the “history of modern art” with no local specification, or with all kinds of adjectives specifying the regional (for example, the art of Eastern Europe, or of the Balkans) or – more often – the ethnic locality (for instance, the history of Polish, Slovak or Bulgarian art). The problem of national or ethnic art historical narratives seems very characteristic of the arts outside the center. On the one hand, we have the national art histories of particular countries, on the other the international art history. In fact, the latter’s type of art historical narrative reveals the dynamics of modern art history – again, on the one hand, we have artists with an international status, although all of them actually come from specific countries and their art bears the mark of their national cultures – Pablo Picasso who came from Spain, but is recognized as an international, or universal artist – while on the other hand, there are artists who remain specifically national, even though some of them were once also renowned abroad (such as the ‘Polish’ constructivist Władysław Strzemiński). This reveals tensions of a geographical kind: on the one hand, there are Paris and later New York as international centers of culture, on the other, regional capitals placed in national contexts, such as Belgrade, Copenhagen, Oslo, Prague, Vilnius. Obviously, in the hierarchy of art historical narratives, the former are highly appreciated, while the latter are often underrated or ignored.

In order to address this issue in more detail, I want to ask another question: Apart from the ideological conditions, what were the material

¹⁵ Irit Rogoff, “Engendering Terror”, in: Ursula Biemann (ed.), *Geography and the Politics of Mobility*, Wien-Köln 2003, 33 onward, here 53.

conditions which supported the national constructions of the history of modern art? I think that what mattered most was the lack of direct communication among cultures. If there was any intercommunication at all among marginal cultures, it was via the center, as can be observed on every level. The cultures of particular regions (the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia) looked up to the West, and not at one another. They drew information about each other predominantly from the West, and not from other margins. The same is true for individual national art historical narratives in specific regions, even regions as small as Central Europe. Poles generally have almost no idea about the history of Romanian art – they ignore it out of a superiority complex on behalf of their own culture, which they prefer to compare directly to the West. Similarly, Czechs on average know little, if nothing, about the history of Ukrainian art. The Other, or – again – the “close Other” looks up to the Master, and not at “An-Other”, accepting – often quite unconsciously – the hierarchy of the center to which it has fallen victim. If there is any transfer of values, experience or knowledge, it passes only through the Master (that is, the Western centers) who in this way legitimizes one specific Other in the eyes of “An-Other”.

Of course, the relations between the center and the localities defined in national terms have been changing. Modern culture produced the tension between the national and the international, while contemporary culture, which can be characterized as postmodern, globalized, and multiple, tends to prefer a different vocabulary, promoting local identity. For the sake of universalist utopias of unity, modernism tended to evade any individual identities: ethnic, local, sexual, racial, and others. The very adjective “international” implied a state of being “inter-”, “beyond” or “above” all individual and national features (as, for instance, in the “international” style or art scene). That rhetoric definitely served to conceal the imperialism of the West, as easily perceived on the most basic level of the language used by the “international” society: first French, then English. The present situation, however, calls for new strategies, and the collapse of the universalist utopia indicated by global conflicts makes everyone accept some identity mark at least as a starting point. Good examples of this new attitude have been provided by interpretations of the art of Marina Abramović or Ilya Kabakov, for whom national origins are important. What is more, this tendency promotes a reconstruction of the national origins of many avant-garde ideas, blurred by the paradigm of international modernism, as exemplified by the analyses of the work of Marcel Duchamp in the context of French art, or of Kazimir Malevich in the context of the Russian tradition. Surely, all this is not so brand new, as I already indicated above. Yet when we turn to studies of those two artists

from the 1930s, 1940s or 1950s, they show few traces of the national contextualization of these artists' achievement, which appeared much later.

In this context, a relevant concept is *transnationality*, which, as is well known, is not to be confused with internationality. The concept of transnationality is very useful in order to develop a horizontal art history of the European avant-garde. Of course, an open model of writing global art history must include other aspects of identity as well, rooted in perspectives different from that of critical geography: specific genders, ethnic groups, subcultures, etc. Such revisions of art history, for instance from a feminist point of view, have been proposed for many years now, but very often they do not break away from the dominant geographico-hierarchical paradigm of modern art history. Transnational art history, negotiating values and concepts along other lines than the opposition of the national versus the international, is now being written as well, as evidenced by the regional art historical narratives mentioned earlier. This maturing transnational discourse comes with the prospect of great significance to our histories of the European avant-garde: a transnational art history enabling its authors to negotiate the local narratives on the transregional, that is, European level.

Translation by Marek Wilczyński.

The 20th Century: Century of the Arrière-Gardes?

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Literary historians have often claimed that the 20th century was the century of the avant-gardes. Like all clichés, however, this one too has its limits, which are all too easy to point out. The title of this essay could suggest that it aims at a mere rhetorical inversion of that well-trodden cliché. But there is more to the phrase “the 20th century, century of the arrière-gardes”. For, when one describes the 20th century as the century of the avant-gardes, the diversity and complexity of this century is obviously underestimated: the existence of arrière-gardes must be taken into account if one really wants to understand the aesthetic plurality of this era. That will be my first point. But one can go further by thinking of the arrière-gardes as another, lesser known aspect of the avant-gardes, and by discovering hidden ties similar to those that bind Proust’s *Guermites*’ and Swann’s ways, both paths which meet up unexpectedly in the novel. Describing the 20th century as “the century of the arrière-gardes” would then be hardly more than a paradoxical equivalent of “the century of the avant-gardes”. That will be my second point. Finally, one might push the paradox still further by considering the arrière-gardes as a key to understanding the 20th century in a much more effective way than the avant-gardes: if a global arrière-gardism is really a main feature of that century, the avant-gardes would then be nothing more than a special and limited case of “the century of the arrière-gardes”. That will be my last point.

The 20th Century Is not Just the Century of the Avant-Gardes

At the end of the 20th century, Vincent Kaufmann opened his excellent book on the avant-garde with the words: “The twentieth century – and there is no sign that the next one will follow the same course – will have

been undeniably the century of the avant-gardes”.¹ This is a classical point of view. But a strange one too, if one thinks of the book’s subtitle: *Avant-gardes 1920-1970*. A funny century indeed, which lasts only fifty years, starting in 1920 and ending in 1970! Could these fifty years possess some sort of a double time value? In his book, Kaufmann studied a vast array of French movements: surrealism, the College of Sociology, the *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (Oulipo), situationism and *Tel Quel*. But where have the first twenty years of the century gone? And the last thirty years?

Kaufmann is but one example of a more collective form of amnesia. Traditionally, the French narrative of literature in the 20th century starts with World War One, that is, roughly with dada and surrealism. What came before does not really count or is merely forgotten. It is easy then to describe the 20th century as the century of the avant-gardes, although this vision is only partial.

Nevertheless, it must be properly understood that I do not recommend in any way the rejection of the phrase “century of the avant-gardes” or condemn any use of it. I only say this: when this phrase is used, one must be well aware of what is being done. For the avant-gardes may legitimately appear crucial enough in the literary and artistic history of the 20th century to name it after them even if, in so doing, one overlooks the rest. This choice is perfectly justifiable, as long as it is understood to belong to the axiological order: it is a value judgment, and one should not use the phrase “century of the avant-gardes” if that value judgment is not made explicit.

But the problem is entirely different if one wants to make that phrase, “century of the avant-gardes”, into a statement about truth, and give it epistemological value. Another demonstration would then be necessary, which would not be easy: one should be able to show that the history of art makes more sense if one emphasizes innovations and forerunners rather than remainders and continuities. Why not? But this proposal must at least be debated. Although it cannot be easily decided, it is much discussed, for sure: Thomas Pavel recently deplored that the traditional history of literature stresses emergences much more than persistences.²

It is a fact that there are arts, in some cultures and at some times, which can be grasped more accurately if one emphasizes long-lasting continuities rather than the fast succession of innovations. Let us think, for example, of the history of classical or Far-Eastern poetry: this poetry is largely based on the repeated appropriation – with slight variations – of

¹ Vincent Kaufmann, *Poétique des groupes littéraires (avant-gardes 1920-1970)*, Paris 1997, 3.

² Thomas Pavel, *La Pensée du roman*, Paris 2003, 27-31.

thematic and formal patterns whose long-term permanence is striking. One might easily object that what could well be true, as far as Graeco-Latin, Chinese or Japanese poetry is concerned, is completely false in the case of the European literature of the 20th century, which can be characterized by a universal and frantic race for innovation. But that is precisely what must be proven! And, as Pavel said, the 20th century might well be a bit more complicated than that ...

When one talks about “the century of the avant-gardes”, many pieces of the puzzle are deliberately brushed aside: post-symbolism, neo-classicism (which lasted thirty or forty years in poetry and theater), post-realism and post-naturalism (which left their mark on a large number of novels throughout the century), more recently postmodernism, etc. Although it might be quite fashionable to despise “posts” and “neos”, they cannot be denied the right to exist or, at least, to have had an existence. Moreover, are those “posts” and “neos” really that despicable? If one does not want to take them into consideration, how should we classify Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Anatole France, Charles Péguy, Thomas Hardy, André Gide, W.B. Yeats, Paul Valéry, François Mauriac or Giorgos Seferis, just to name a few famous writers, mainly chosen among the laureates of the Nobel prize of literature? It would be too easy to reply that as a matter of principle such great authors cannot be classified. They may not be classified, but they still can be explained if one uses the “post” and “neo” categories: how can Hardy and Mauriac be understood without the help of naturalism, Proust or Seferis without symbolism? Of course, one may also reply that some of these writers are not so great, and that their rank in the canon should be revised. Why not? But what do we really want to do in that case: write a history of the current canonical literature based on retrospective judgments, or give an accurate and objective overview of what the literature of the 20th century really was in its time? Let us beware of axiological choices. One may think, for example, that France and Mauriac did not deserve their Nobel prizes in literature. Nevertheless they were important in their own time: one cannot treat them as if they had not been there. And even if one can do without France and Mauriac in a picture of the European literature of the 20th century, it would not be advisable to do the same with Mann or Proust.

In short, whether one likes it or not, there were arrière-gardes in the 20th century, and arrière-gardes which have a high rank in the canon. Of course, that is not enough to name that century “century of the arrière-gardes”, but one thing is now established, namely that the 20th century belongs no more to the avant-gardes than it does to the arrière-gardes. Let us beware of such rough descriptions, or let us use them with caution.

The Arrière-Garde, or the Other Side of the Avant-Garde

May we go further than that? We shall see here that, insofar as the *arrière-garde* has a consubstantial relationship with the *avant-garde*, the two cannot be separated: if the 20th century is the century of the *avant-gardes*, it must also be the century of the *arrière-gardes*.

Arrière-garde has not been defined yet. The figurative meaning of this word is quite recent in the history of literature and art. Paradoxically enough, the *arrière-garde* is a modern concept. As for *avant-garde*, the origin was military: *avant-garde* or *vanguard* literally refers to the forces who march before the army, *arrière-garde* or *rearguard* to those who close the march. The figurative meaning of *avant-garde* emerged very early in French, at the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century, but this meaning became frequent in the 19th century, with Balzac or Hugo, and was used to name an innovative group in the field of ideas or arts, although that meaning was still perceived as metaphorical. There was a parallel development in English: figurative uses of *vanguard* appeared in the first half of the 19th century; at the beginning of the 20th century, *vanguard* was used only in its literal meaning, and the French word *avant-garde* replaced it in uses of the figurative sense. Communist discourse, particularly the works of Blanqui and Lenin, did a great deal to further the figurative use of the term *avant-garde*. In fact, the communist party was commonly referred to as *avant-garde* as compared to the workers and to the masses in general. It is certainly no accident that the term was taken up in the 20th century by aesthetic movements with political and social agendas.

As for the term *arrière-garde*, its use in a figurative sense comes somewhat later than that of *avant-garde*. There are occurrences of the term *retroguardia* in the Italian language as early as the first half of the 19th century.³ But it is not until the 1930s that the figurative use of the word appears in French, and it is not until the 1960s that its figurative meaning really begins to spread, most often in the fixed syntagm, *combat d'arrière-garde*, a term in vogue at the time despite its having little or no precedent in the language.⁴ In English the figurative use of the term *rearguard* is quite minimal and only appears very recently. In German, dictionaries do not even make mention of a possible figurative meaning for *Nachhut* even though one certainly exists for *Vorhut*. So the notion of an aesthetic *arrière-*

³ Salvatore Battaglia (ed.), *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, Vol. 15, Turin 1990, 942. Strangely enough, according to the same Battaglia, there was no figurative use of *aranguardia* before the end of the 19th century. Obviously, the lexicographical research should be carried on.

⁴ The database Frantext forms the foundation for the lexicographical research in this essay.

garde or *rearguard* is relatively recent and only begins to develop when “chronic avant-gardism”⁵ becomes the functioning norm for literature and for the arts in general. This was already the case in the interwar period and even more so after 1945 and into the 1960s with Tel Quel, the Nouveau Roman, situationism, etc.

It is worth noting that *arrière-garde* in its figurative meaning always carries a negative connotation whereas in its literal meaning, it has none whatsoever: the rear-guard is a normal component of any army; its role, which is fundamental, is to protect and cover the rear. In fact, throughout military history, one can observe just the opposite phenomenon: the best generals are assigned to its command. Its negative use is symptomatic of the close ties that exist between the aesthetic meaning of *arrière-garde* and avant-gardist ideology. When the avant-garde dominates, the term *arrière-garde* becomes a convenient insult the aim of which is to discredit adversaries. The concept of *arrière-garde* belongs to the broad array of the avant-garde’s ideological tools.

So the rearguard only exists inasmuch as an avant-garde does. Nevertheless, we have already seen that the term *arrière-garde* is in no way parallel to that of the *avant-garde*. The figurative meaning of *arrière-garde* may well be a product of avant-garde discourse at a time when the latter were triumphant, but the figurative meaning of *arrière-garde* still emerges well after that of the avant-garde. In other words, the symmetry of the two notions is only at the surface; we can use one without the other. From an aesthetic viewpoint, this is because the avant-garde does not necessarily determine what its rearguard will be, for reasons that are easy enough to see: if by definition the aesthetic avant-garde opposes most literary or artistic production in a given era, the rest, that is the vast majority of *other* works and authors, still does not make up the *arrière-garde* because this group can only be a minority. A rear-guard only appears when almost everyone else is caught up in the tide and feels a sense of solidarity with the *avant-garde*. A number of *whens* must coalesce to make an *arrière-garde* possible: when the modern ideology of artistic progress makes deep inroads with the masses, when the masses, caught up in the irresistible momentum of a movement, divorce themselves *ipso facto* from residual elements that remain behind, when the people sincerely believe in progress in the arts, then the period of the *arrière-garde* truly begins. The *arrière-garde* appears as the inevitable consequence of the development of modernity, materializing at a specific stage in the latter’s advance.

⁵ Albert Thibaudet, *Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours*, Paris 1936, 487.

Within this ideological context, the metaphor of the *combat d'arrière-garde*, which enjoyed such success in the 1960s, is not without its interpretative difficulties. For instance, in an army, there are two basic circumstances in which a rearguard may engage in combat: during an advance, when the army is ambushed from the rear, and during a retreat, in order to protect fleeing forces. In the first instance, that of the advance, the rearguard is moving in the same direction as the vanguard; it is simply behind the latter, closing ranks instead of opening them. In a figurative sense then, the rearguard appears thus as a Johnny-come-lately movement, adopting tardily the aesthetic of the avant-garde.

Of course, those who use the expression *combat d'arrière-garde* do not mean it in this way at all: for them, the *arrière-garde* have joined forces with isolated elements of some wayward army in order to wage a hopeless battle against the forces of progress. So instead of going in the same direction as the avant-garde, as they would in a real army, the *arrière-garde*, as they are thus defined, go in the opposite direction. They no longer belong to the army of the avant-garde but to some opposing force which is hostile to the avant-garde, and they fight tooth and nail against the avant-garde, who in turn must spur and push these unwilling warriors forward. The *arrière-garde* then become synonymous with reactionary aesthetics. This is how the *doxa* most often define them. But we must nevertheless keep in mind the initial meaning: that of latecomers to some aesthetic, those who would go, despite it all, and even perhaps despite themselves, in the direction shown them by the avant-garde. This ambiguity in the notion of *arrière-garde* is essential for the critic. It allows him or her to considerably enrich the debate by avoiding a kind of bipolarity which would be too reductive and which would necessarily oppose *arrière-garde* and *avant-garde*. More importantly, this ambiguity allows the critic to use the concept in order to study objectively, and with the necessarily epistemological distance, movements and authors who never used the term to define themselves.

We can thus define two categories of *arrière-garde*:

– a qualified *arrière-garde* or a “post” *arrière-garde*, that is to say, a group who finds itself *de facto* – and without having explicitly conceptualized its tardiness – entrenched in a dated aesthetic movement, behind the avant-garde of the moment. Each generation is followed by its rearguard, who is fighting the avant-garde of the next generation. And in fact, each avant-garde inevitably finds itself identified with an *arrière-garde* of its own: thus, during the 1920s the last Parnassians and the last symbolists, representatives of a movement that was at the forefront or the avant-garde at the end of the 19th century, can be considered the *arrière-garde* to surreal-

ism, a “post” arrière-garde. This is why Anatole France was a prime target for surrealists.

– an absolute arrière-garde or “neo” arrière-garde, in other words, those having made the deliberate choice to look back to literary and art history’s past: among them would be all the “neos” who claim to be such (for instance, the neoclassicists in the years between 1907 and 1914). From a sociological point of view, a “neo” arrière-garde is very similar to an avant-garde. Nothing resembles a group of youths who proclaim themselves to be in opposition to present realities more than another group of youths who boast an analogous claim, even if the first group is looking forward and the second is looking backwards. After all, a protest is defined more by the fact that it opposes something than by its actual direction.

As with any avant-garde, a “neo” arrière-garde can end up as a “post” arrière-garde: at the end of the 20th century, the poetic movement known as the “École romane” was little more than the tail end of the “École romane” begun by Jean Moréas at the end of the preceding century. On the other hand, a “post” arrière-garde cannot easily transform itself into a “neo” arrière-garde, unless its adherents agree to a complete intellectual and sociological reversal of course.

It is possible then to present a few temporarily conclusive statements: the existence of the arrière-garde is the necessary consequence of the triumph of the avant-garde. The further ahead we go, the more those who remain behind become visible. This is why, even if the 20th century became the century of the avant-gardes, it was also a century that witnessed the extraordinary proliferation of “post” and “neo” arrières-gardes of every stripe. To define the 20th century as the century of the arrières-gardes is of course paradoxical, but that does not make it any less accurate: the century of the avant-gardes and the century of the arrières-gardes are two faces of the same reality, in the same way that Waterloo is a resounding victory for the English and an humiliating defeat for the French. Nevertheless, just as there was only one Waterloo, there is only one 20th century.

On the Arrière-Garde of the Avant-garde

I am nevertheless aware that this second point’s conclusion is just a tad disappointing: it does seem too easy to put the avant-garde and the arrière-garde back to back, like two faces of an object which changes its appearance as one changes perspective. Of course, I am caricaturing somewhat (to my detriment!) my own position, which is in fact a bit more

subtle. In reality I believe that it is not the avant-garde alone but rather the triumph of the avant-garde that provoked the rise of the arrière-garde, but I accept the principle of this auto-critique in order to motivate me to advance an even stronger argument, which can be expressed in the following manner: in 20th-century literature, there is a generalized arrière-garde sentiment which can be found at the very heart of the avant-garde movement.

In fact, modernism (or modernity) is not a univocal movement. For several years now, much emphasis has been placed upon its “paradoxes”, to use Antoine Compagnon’s words to describe an aesthetic deeply affected by the complexity of internal tensions.⁶ Baudelaire himself, who is always humming a tune about modernity, only does so in order to raise the alarm: modernity in his mind is inseparable from the painful realization of its negative effects, as in the revealing passage where the poet mocks “the French love and predilection for military metaphors”. And among the examples that Baudelaire cites at random, there are two in especial which include the following commentary: “Warrior poets. The avant-garde literati. This tendency to use military metaphors reveals minds which are not truly militant but rather made for discipline, that is to say, for conformity, minds which are servants born, Belgian minds, minds which cannot even think outside of the group”.⁷ Even though this criticism of the avant-garde hardly makes Baudelaire a devotee of the arrière-garde, it nevertheless places him in awkward position perfectly in keeping with what Compagnon identifies as the “antimodernes”.⁸ Does not Sartre himself say of the poet that he “chose to advance with the greatest reticence, his eyes turned to the past, crouched in the bottom of the carriage carrying him away, with his gaze fixed resolutely upon the road vanishing before him”?⁹

A few decades later, during the 1910s and 20s, the modernist revolution itself, as it spread across the European continent, would come to be defined as a kind of return to a lost classicism and a lost tradition. Of course, the idea of return is not without ties to the notion of *arrière-garde*. One only need remember Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot on the Anglo-American side, or Jacques Rivière and *La Nouvelle Revue française* on the French side. The same Eliot who had revolutionized poetry with the *Waste Land* proclaimed himself just a few years later, in a now famous profession

⁶ Antoine Compagnon, *Les Cinq Paradoxes de la modernité*, Paris 1990.

⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 1, Paris 1975, 690-1.

⁸ Antoine Compagnon, *Les Antimodernes: de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes*, Paris 2005.

⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*, Paris [1947]1994, 151.

of faith, as “classisist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion”.¹⁰ And let us not forget that the same *NRF* which would become an essential element in French literature between the World Wars, opened in 1919 with a proclamation made by its new director, Rivière, who predicted the advent of an authentic “renaissance classique”.¹¹ In 1920 one critic noted that the word *tradition* had become very fashionable and mocked the cubists for proclaiming far and wide their devotion to Poussin and David as a way of justifying their horrible scribble.¹² In addition, Paul Valéry, whose poetry was appreciated by both André Breton and the last néo-classicists, struck commercial and aesthetic gold thanks to this ambivalence.

Tradition, classicism: these terms are an integral part of the modernist panoply. Let us just take one example: this is a not-so-well known modernist review whose title, *Tambour*, puts it squarely in the lineage of the military metaphors so rued by Baudelaire. In its first number, its founder Harold J. Salemsen, an American living in Paris, presents the review’s agenda in 1929:

To interpret the past is to express the present; to express the present is to create the future. All artistic expression, past, present and future, and whatever the tendency, is *tolerable*. It is only in recognizing the movement, whether it be *avant* or *arrière*, of art that we will be able to determine its meaning and value. The new direction can only be perceived through the light that is shed upon it by the lessons of the past.¹³

The asserted ties to the past opening up in all areas of art whether they be progressive or retrograde, makes of this manifesto a summary of sorts of all the tensions within modernism. Most surprising in this is perhaps the fact that the dicta of this manifesto were applied to the letter: the number 5 of the review was entirely devoted to the praise and veneration of Anatole France, an abhorred figure of the avant-garde if there ever was

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order*, London 1928, ix.

¹¹ Jacques Rivière, “La Nouvelle Revue Française”, in: *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 69, June 1919, 1-12, here 8. Rivière did not even refrain from linking Proust’s novel to the “classical tradition”. See his “Marcel Proust et la tradition classique”, in: *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 77, February 1920, 192-200.

¹² Camille Mauclair, “De Flaubert et du style”, in: *La Semaine littéraire* (Geneva), 1366, 6 March 1920, 109. Among the slogans of the time, Auguste Dupouy mentioned the word *tradition*. See: Auguste Dupouy, “Écrivains morts pour la patrie”, in: Charles Le Goffic, *La Littérature française aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles: tableau général accompagné de pages types*, Vol. 2, Paris 1919.

¹³ Harold J. Salemsen, in *Tambour*, 1, 1929, 1-2. The review *Tambour*, which published only 8 issues, did not go beyond 1930.

one and equally detested by the surrealists. These odd bedfellows who appeared in the very same review, from Anatole France to authors as *avant-garde* as Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau, Philippe Soupault, Eugenio Montale, Massimo Bontempelli or Paul Bowles, lend a quasi schizophrenic personality to the review, which makes it captivating to study: *avant-garde* and *arrière-garde* are often as indistinguishable as Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (as to which is Jekyll and which is Hyde, that is another question entirely).

So an *avant-garde* can hide an *arrière-garde*. But the inverse is true as well: in every *arrière-garde* there lurks a powerful *avant-garde*. I have already said this: nothing resembles a group of the *avant-garde* more than a group of the “neo” *arrière-garde*. For is the past to which all reactionary movements profess devotion, really just the past? Is it not in principle something irrevocably new? Eliot expresses quite well the problem in a phenomenological perspective: “You either live the past, and then it is present, or you remember it, and then it is not the same past as you once lived : the difference is not between two objects, but between two points of view”.¹⁴ And elsewhere: “the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show”.¹⁵ In other words, the past we remember cannot be reduced to the past we have lived: the identity of words cannot mask the difference of mental objects. You never swim in the same river twice, and you never write the same book twice.

This is why no one is more *avant-garde* than Borges’ character Pierre Menard,¹⁶ whose project to recreate a word-for-word *Don Quixote* for the 20th century seems at first glance to fully incarnate the *arrière-garde*; Borges nevertheless demonstrates that, written in the 20th century, Cervantès’ novel has another meaning altogether than in the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*. In their way, the French neoclassical devotees from around 1910 are authentic Pierre Menards: no matter how retrograde they appear, the classicism that they defend takes on a new meaning that we must decipher.

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, New York [1916]1964, 51.

¹⁵ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, London 1999, 16.

¹⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (1944), in : *Obras completas*, Vol. 1: 1923-1949, Barcelona 1989, 425-530, here 444-50.

The Triumph of Post-Literature

It is indeed a strange century, this 20th century in literature – its first half in especial – in which avant-gardes turned to the past and arrière-gardes cultivated ambitions which turned out to be avant-garde in nature! How to explain such an unexpected convergence between the avant-garde and the arrière-garde? What if both one and the other were symptoms of a single crisis literature faced at that period? It is with this hypothesis that I would like to conclude.

The history of literature from the last century could well be thought of as one long traumatism. For ever since, at the turn of the 20th century, when some European writers – Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Valéry, Hugo von Hofmannsthal – took their farewell of literature in a more or less flamboyant gesture, nothing in literature has really been the same. These writers either ceased to write pure and simple or, in a more perverse approach, wrote and described in great detail their refusal of writing.¹⁷ It is not that these positions upset the least little thing in the reigning order. They were simply symptoms of a latent instability in the literary order itself. We should consider the attitude of these writers not so much as the effect of their individual whims as the alarming symptom of a crisis of confidence general to literature. Suddenly, some writers had the distinct feeling that literary activity had been surpassed and that, in one way or other, it was no longer worthy of them: it was a phase in their evolution that they should now forget in order to give themselves to something else, to life, to the sacred, or to any other type of writing, for instance. Perhaps these writers were simply more sensitive, more fragile or even more gifted than their contemporaries, which allowed them to express in very distinct fashion the ambiguity or the difficulties of their rapport with literature. But the situation was more or less the same for everyone, even if other artists, critics or the public retained a more confused perception of things. It is useless even to count the number of authors who tried, each in their own way and within the limits of their powers and abilities, to re-enact the silence of Rimbaud, from André Breton to Tommaso Landolfi, from Robert Bazlen to Maurice Blanchot, Jean Paulhan or Michel Leiris, to name only a few. Each time it happened with varying degrees of success, depending upon the case at hand.¹⁸

¹⁷ William Marx, *L'Adieu à la littérature: histoire d'une dévalorisation (XVIII^e-XX^e siècle)*, Paris 2005.

¹⁸ Laurent Nunez, *Les Écrivains contre l'écriture (1900-2000)*, Paris 2006, 95-153.

Since the end of the 19th century then, literature has been living under the sign of anachronism: it does not feel in sync anymore, either with society and with the expectations it no longer feels capable of fulfilling, or – fate which is even worse – with itself and with the ideals that Romanticism lent to it. It is not enough then to consider arrière-gardism as the simple reality of a few marginalized literary movements which should only interest us to the extent we seek to exhaust all aspects of history. On the contrary, we should enlarge our perspective and face the facts: literature in the 20th century existed in a state of generalized arrière-gardism, and in the general feeling of a permanent time delay of which, paradoxically, the existence of the avant-garde was the most flagrant indicator. If the century that has just ended can still retain the title “century of the avant-garde”, and if the avant-garde has succeeded in making its presence felt more than ever, it is for a reason. And it is for the same reason that the question of the rapport with the past has never been asked with such anguish: in the 20th century, literature lost its temporal markers and had to create other artificial ones to remedy the loss; the invention of avant-gardist tension, a tension that was as political as it was aesthetic, had no other real function but to impose a powerful orientation – even though it was in part a fictional one – on a history that seemed to lack meaning. The avant-garde forges a way to the future: it seeks a way out of the crisis by moving ahead or simply by leaving History. Vincent Kaufmann puts it this way: the avant-garde authors “never tackled anything else than the project of a *total book*, that is, *the Book*, representing the *end* of books, in every sense of the word”.¹⁹

On the other hand, for the arrière-garde, the solution lay in a return to the situation that was anterior to the crisis itself. In the eyes of its devotees, writing means rewriting and thus rewriting history. But these two positions which are *a priori* antithetical, one which looks to the future and one which turns to the past, meet at the point where both deliberately ignore the present, which is the crisis properly speaking. And this paradoxical convergence explains a good deal of misunderstandings and ambiguities: for instance we have seen that despite appearances, there were arrière-gardist traits in the avant-garde movements and an authentic avant-gardist energy and dynamic among the arrière-garde.

Because in the 20th century literature felt surpassed, abandoned, devalued, it also felt itself becoming something of the past, no longer contemporary, and writers had the impression they were simply participants in a rearguard battle. Between *surpassed* and the *past* there is far more than a

¹⁹ Kaufmann, *Poétique des groupes littéraires*, 11.

difference of prefixes and of a letter or two: what happened was the transformation of an axiological question into a chronological question. For the avant-garde as for the arrière-garde, the problem of the status of literature became one of its rapport to history and to time. For both one and the other, it was all about their response to a profound feeling of being out of sync with history. So which is it? The 20th century, century of the avant-garde or century of the arrière-garde? We have seen here that the question is a vain one to a certain degree, since, in the end, all of literature came to feel it belonged to rearguard. The 20th century was less the century of the arrière-garde than the century of arrière-gardism. It was the triumph of a literature having survived the idea of literature in the way that Romanticism had formulated it. The triumph of what we should call *post-literature*.

Translation by Jane Blevins.

“The Serpent Eats Its Tail”: Avant-Garde and Arrière-garde in Paris, 1943-1953¹

Natalie Adamson (University of St Andrews)

One no longer knows very well where the avant-garde is. With the abstracts? Or the neo-realists? It's extremely annoying that there no longer exist, as in the good old days, all-mighty academicisms against which one could launch oneself. Today all the doors are ajar: there is not much left to kick open. [...] People search in vain for the avant-garde and the arrière-garde of modern art, the beginning and the end. The serpent eats its tail. For yet another day or for ten years, art goes in circles.²

In 1953 the young art critic Pierre Descargues diagnosed an unnameable and unbearable affliction in the Parisian artworld. He describes a situation where the avant-garde is not only indistinguishable from the arrière-garde; it is even conceivable that they are both extinct, as are the academic bastions of reactionary tradition that rebellious innovators launched themselves against in the past. His diagnosis twists around a compelling meta-

¹ I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, whose generous support during the last two years made this project possible, and the British Academy for a Conference Travel Grant in May 2008. For their insightful remarks and suggestions, I thank Steven Harris, Alistair Rider, Toby Norris, my co-panelists Sarah Linford and Vivian Rehberg, and the audience at the *Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies* conference in Ghent, May 2008. A version of this paper is also published in Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris (eds.), *Academic, Pompiere and Arrière-Garde: Traditional Art in France, 1900-1960*, Newcastle 2010 (forthcoming). All translations are my own, with warm thanks to David Evans.

² Pierre Descargues, “Les Frontaliers”, in: Robert Lebel (ed.), *Premier Bilan de l'Art Actuel 1937-1953*, Paris 1953, 5-56, here 50. “On ne sait plus très bien où se trouve l'avant-garde. Avec les abstraits? Avec les néo-réalistes? C'est bien gênant qu'il n'y ait plus, comme au bon vieux temps, des académismes tout-puissants contre lesquels on puisse se lancer. Aujourd'hui toutes les portes sont ouvertes: on ne trouve plus grand-chose à enfoncer. [...] On cherche en vain l'avant-garde et l'arrière-garde de l'art moderne, le début et la fin. Le serpent se mord la queue. Pour un jour encore ou pour dix ans, l'art vit en cercles”. Descargues (born in 1926) began to cover the exhibition scene in Paris in 1945, writing for *Arts* (often using the pen-name ‘Sidoine’, borrowed from the Gallo-Roman poet, noble and saint Sidoine Apollinaire (430-c.483) who was exiled for resistance to the Visigoths in 474) and later on primarily for *Les Lettres françaises*.

phor of frustration: the serpent of time, unable to slither forwards in a linear direction, eats its own tail. Art goes in circles without a guiding compass, repeatedly treading over its own tracks and temporally condemned to an indefinite pilgrimage of eternal return.³

Descargues' essay appeared in the *Premier Bilan de l'art actuel 1937-1953*, a remarkable book-length survey of contemporary art. The focus of the sections on painting in France, written by well-known commentators such as Georges Duthuit, Michel Tapié, Robert Lebel and R. van Gindertael, was the dividing lines between realism and abstraction, and implicitly, the moot question of progress in either mode of representation. In the resurgent postwar press and publications like the *Premier Bilan*, the rhetoric of art criticism makes it evident that conflict between realism and abstraction was experienced not merely as the result of trivial factional disputes between rival artists, critics and dealers. Upon the Liberation of Paris in August 1944, the phoenix-like rebirth of the École de Paris was greeted as testimony to the unvanquished, regenerative power of modern painting and as the herald of an artistic renaissance that would, again, flourish in France. But less than a decade later, according to Descargues and others, not even a meaningful and identifiable arrière-garde had arisen from the ashes of the war to offer a redemptive solution.

With this temporal and ideological collapse in mind, this essay discusses the appearance and significance of the unusual sobriquet – arrière-garde – in two instances of art criticism positioned a decade apart. The first example appeared in 1943, in a review of the Salon d'Automne by the extreme right-wing critic Lucien Rebatet, which he published in the collaborationist, fascist newspaper *Je suis partout*. A historical understanding of how an arrière-garde was conceptualised emerges from the reception of the work of the so-called *Jeunes peintres de tradition française* who were targeted by Rebatet. A decade later, Descargues intervened with his ambiguous evaluation of the artistic scene and a sympathetic analysis of a group of painters he entitled *Les Frontaliers* (The Boundary-Dwellers, many of whom were formerly *Jeunes peintres*), who were dedicated to a mediated route through the extremes of realism and abstraction. In turn, the critical reception of the Russian-born painter Nicolas de Staël provides another, significant example of the ruling conflict, as his work was seen in 1952 to oscillate between figuration and abstraction.

³ The serpent whose mouth clasps its tail is the circular figure of Ouruborus, the “tail-devourer” serpent or dragon, which originated in ancient Egypt as the figure of the cosmos and eternity. It becomes common in later ancient Greek alchemical texts: “la fin est un commencement et le commencement la fin”. See the *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, Zurich-Munich 1994, 136.

The emergence of *arrière-garde* as a descriptive term indicates a profound crisis in the conceptualisation of a national, modern tradition of painting (the *École de Paris*).⁴ It articulates an ontological turning point, largely un-studied to date, in the relationship between painting and the principles of *avant-garde* practice in Europe. As will be seen, *arrière-garde* points to a particular consciousness of time characterised as historical, crisis-ridden, transitional, anti-progressive and asymmetrical in relationship to the past.⁵ This anguished temporality, whereupon progress is seen to turn backwards and inwards, was most acute in the fifteen or so years after the end of the war, when artists and critics were endeavouring to comprehend, given their partial knowledge, or jettisoning, the projects of those now regarded as *avant-garde* from before the war (whether cubism, dada, surrealism, *De Stijl* or constructivism).

Avant-garde and Arrière-garde

As is well-documented, the concept of the *avant-garde* and its application within the cultural sphere began to emerge in the mid-19th century when it was used to designate art and artists thought to herald and generate fundamental changes in society; for Baudelaire, however, the migration of a military term into the cultural domain was a mal-appropriated metaphor which encouraged false radicalism.⁶ Though *arrière-garde* possesses a similarly long-held military valency, it seems much less frequently used in 20th-century art criticism. If it was applied to aesthetic questions during the 1930s and became much more colloquial from 1961, its significance has not been broached in art historical accounts of the *avant-garde* and its

⁴ See Natalie Adamson, *Painting, Politics, and the Struggle for the École de Paris, 1944-1964*, Aldershot 2009.

⁵ In thinking through the time-ridden crisis of painting in France at mid-century, I am indebted to Peter Osborne (*The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London 1995) and also to Hannah Arendt's thoughts on "The Gap between Past and Future" (in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, London [1954]1993, 3-15) – in the immediate postwar moment, notably in France, the breach between past and future, caused by the eviction of the present, and provoked by the collapse of tradition, "became a tangible reality and perplexity for all; that is, it became a fact of political relevance" (Arendt, "The Gap between Past and Future", 14).

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *Mon cœur mis à nu* (Edition établi diplomatiquement par Claude Pichois), Geneva 2001, Part XXIII, paras 39-41. In brief, see Johann Lamoureux, "Avant-Garde: A Historiography of a Critical Concept", in: *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones, Oxford 2006, 191-212.

counterparts.⁷ However, the spatial nature of these terms has been sufficiently colloquial to make the occasional use of *arrière-garde* clear, at least superficially: it signifies the opposite pole to that occupied by the avant- or vanguard in the combat zone. For example, in 1931 Jacques-Emile Blanche, the critic and academic portrait painter, recorded his disappointment with the conformist parade of tendencies in the works on display at the Musée de Luxembourg, noting the presence of: “all sections of the regiment from the avant-garde to the arrière-garde”.⁸ Blanche designates as *arrière-garde* the remainders of academic art hung in close proximity to the ranks of the realists, impressionists, and neo-impressionists, but he also suggests that the indiscriminate mingling of groups and *maîtres de file* degrades the viewer’s ability to discern authentic innovation.

But *arrière-garde* cannot be simply and reductively identified with what some critics would call reactionary or kitsch. For in the French context, *arrière-garde* bears within it a telling ideological inflection, most commonly displayed in the phrase “mener un combat d’arrière-garde” (“to fight a rearguard action”): meaning the defence of a cause that one already knows to be lost. More than simply indicating the tail-end position for a battalion, the *arrière-garde* attempts, futilely, to come from behind to win a battle where the outcome has been decided already. And yet, the struggle continues over stakes whose value is more than merely the conquest of terrain.⁹ The temporal and metaphorical dimensions of *arrière-garde*, whilst dating back to the 12th century, are highlighted by the work of the highly esteemed Catholic and nationalist writer, Charles Péguy. In an essay of 1910 entitled “Notre jeunesse”, Péguy speaks eloquently of the last great effort of republicanism when faced with the challenge of the Dreyfus Affair and of his uncertainty that the next generation will be able to reconnect to the ideals of the past and renew the authentic republican

⁷ See the article by William Marx in this book, compare his “Penser les arrière-gardes”, in: William Marx (ed.), *Les arrière-gardes au XX^e siècle: L’autre face de la modernité esthétique*, Paris 2004, 7. Neither Renato Poggioli (in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, tr. Gerald Fitzgerald, Cambridge, Mass. 1968) nor Peter Bürger (in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, tr. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis 1984) mention the *arrière-garde*.

⁸ Jacques-Emile Blanche, *Les Arts Plastiques*, Paris 1931, 330.

⁹ *Le Robert Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (2000) notes that the use of *arrière* indicated a temporal lag (XII-XIII) and then a spatial contrast (XII onwards). The term *arrière-garde* was used militarily pre-1150 as well as figuratively. *Le Robert Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1989, page 558), notes various metaphorical applications; for example André Siegfried (*L’Ame des peuples*, Paris 1950, 22) comments that “L’humanisme n’apparaît plus que comme un combat d’arrière-garde”, in remarking upon the change in consciousness effected after the technological destruction wrought by World War One.

esprit. In Péguy's view, the "true" republicans are cut off in time and space from the mass troops, separated from the originators of belief, and suspended in a modern epoch where faith had become redundant. Thus Péguy designated his own spiritualised republicanism as that which has been defeated. But, over and above certain defeat, the original idealism must be sustained: "what we know with total certainty is that for the moment we are the *arrière-garde*".¹⁰

Accordingly, extrapolated from Péguy's deployment of the term, the temporal rhythm of an *arrière-garde* refuses to conform to the teleological logic of the new with its insistence on the forward march. Its temporality is a kind of interregnum or transitional time; moreover, as Péguy says, it is "badly situated" but "historically situated at a critical point, at a discriminating point".¹¹ The discriminating point, for art history, comes at mid-century when it is recognised that the heroic idealism of the *avant-gardes* of the pre-World War One and interwar periods cannot be maintained and that their innovations and breakthroughs (chiefly, in abstraction) have become sufficiently commonplace as to be traditional. Thus the *arrière-garde* is not merely reactionary and anti-modernist, but can describe artists seeking to renew and defend the *avant-garde* legacy, to maintain the innovative strength of modernism, in the knowledge that their efforts are belated and potentially anachronistic.

The Salon d'Automne: *Arrière-garde* Revolutionaries

A striking, apposite use of the term *arrière-garde* appeared in Rebatet's acidic review of the Salon d'Automne of 1943, which in his view displayed the true depths of decadence. Xenophobic and rabidly anti-semitic, Rebatet professed his approval for new paintings by Pierre Bonnard and Henri Matisse, and for the poetic realism of Maurice Brianchon. For the most part, however, he declaimed that the Salon is full of

¹⁰ Charles Péguy, "Notre jeunesse" (1910), in: *Œuvres en prose 1909-1914*, Paris 1961, 503-655, here 507-8: "ce que nous connaissons de toute certitude, c'est que pour l'instant nous sommes l'*arrière-garde*". For commentary, see David Carroll's chapter "The Beautiful Community: The Fascist Legacy of Charles Péguy", in: *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture*, New Jersey 1995, 53, and Antoine Compagnon, "L'*arrière-garde*, de Péguy à Paulhan et Barthes", in: Marx (ed.), *Les arrière-gardes*, 93-101.

¹¹ Péguy, "Notre jeunesse", 508-9. "Nous sommes extrêmement mal situés. Nous sommes en effet historiquement situés à un point critique, à un point de discernement, à ce point de discrimination".

over-done convolutions. There are entire panels consecrated to the more or less orthodox epigones of cubism, like Jacques Villon, and to the old jewish anarchy in all its contortions, or again to the exasperated pastichers of Matisse's most recent style, which is, alas, of a highly distressing senility.¹²

In addition to the Salon d'Automne, the immediate catalyst for Rebatet's abuse was the publication of a de luxe colour-plated book entitled *Cinq peintres d'aujourd'hui*. The cautiously pro-modernist art critic Roger Lesbats (known after the war as Frank Elgar) – whom Rebatet derides as “the great cacographer” – scripted an introduction to obviously modernist paintings by the up-and-coming artists Édouard Pignon, André Beaudin, Francisco Borès, Maurice Estève and Léon Gischia. If Lesbats saw their work as a “living dialogue” with the past, notably with cubism, Rebatet summed up the paintings as “the most remarkable, error-ridden collection, of laborious rehash of Cézanne, Picasso, Rouault, Lhote, of half-finished waste, mental contortion, arbitrariness and impotence”.¹³

Perhaps (though it seems unlikely, since he did not review it), Rebatet had earlier viewed the small, discrete exhibition at Galerie Braun in May 1941, *Jeunes peintres de tradition française*. Organised by the painter Jean Bazaine, this exhibition asserted the living presence of modernist painting against an arts scene that had been ruthlessly constrained by the Occupation. The participants included Bazaine, Alfred Manessier, Pignon, Beaudin, Borès and Gischia, Jean Le Moal, Gustave Singier, Suzanne Roger, Charles Lapicque and Lucien Lautrec, displaying a diverse group of works notable for their modernism. Pignon, for example, exhibited “post-Lhotist” paintings akin to his *Nature morte au buste* (1941), which boldly synthesised the glowing fusion of light with colour learnt from the fauves with a modified deformation of the objects in their surrounding space that may be credited to cubism.¹⁴

¹² Lucien Rebatet, “A Propos du Salon d'Automne: Révolutionnaires d'arrière-garde”, in: *Je Suis Partout*, 29 October 1943, 6: “tarabiscotages et au faisandé. Ce sont des panneaux entiers consacrés à des épigones plus ou moins orthodoxes du cubisme, tel Jacques Villon, et de la vieille anarchie judaïque dans toutes ses contorsions, ou encore des pasticheurs exaspérés du Matisse dernière manière, qui est, hélas, d'une bien affligeante sénilité”.

¹³ “[L]a plus remarquable collection d'erreur, du rabâchage laborieux de Cézanne, de Picasso, de Rouault, de Lhote, de trognon avorté, de la contorsion mentale, de l'arbitraire, et de l'impuissance”.

¹⁴ Bazaine lists the participants in “Tour d'horizon”, in: *Nouvelle Revue française*, August 1941, 224; reprinted in his *Le Temps de la peinture (1938-1998)*, Paris 2002, 31. See further, Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *L'Art de la défaite, 1940-1944*, Paris 1993, 244-60, and Adamson, *Painting, Politics, and the Struggle for the École de Paris*.



Fig. 1: Édouard Pignon, *Nature morte au buste*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 60 x 73 cm.
Private collection. Artwork © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009

One of the few reviews of the exhibition, in the right-wing newspaper *Le Cri du Peuple*, approved the overt pictorial nods to the modernist masters and the exhibition's message to the small audience to consider the continuation of the "French tradition" by the next generation:

For them, it [the French tradition] does not consist of submission to forms which had, at one time, their *raison d'être*, but of the will to rediscover and perpetuate the spirit which had inspired such forms. [...] These very lively artists animate the conquests of their elders with their youthful vigour.¹⁵

¹⁵ Pierre d'Espezel, "Les peintres de la 'Jeune France'", in: *Le Cri du Peuple*, 20 May 1941, 2. "Pour eux, elle [the French tradition] "ne consiste pas dans la soumission à des formes qui ont eu, un jour, leur raison d'être, mais dans la volonté de retrouver et de perpétuer l'esprit qui les a inspirées. [...] Ces artistes très vivants animent de leur jeune vigueur les conquêtes de leurs aînés".

However, subsequent reviews of the *Jeune peintres* work were not so kind, finding only a “documentary interest”.¹⁶ Rebatet, likewise, dismissed the *Jeunes peintres*’ claims to an original and authentic synthesis of past achievements and berated them for reiterating prewar innovations: spatial and object deformations, non-naturalistic chromatic harmonies, the depiction of light by vivid colour, and the descent into abstraction. In one of his last published missives, reviewing the Salon des Tuileries with an apocalyptic presentiment of a war yet to be fought for art’s future, he dismissed the “graffitis” of Bazaine, the colour harmonies of Estève, and the “inventions” of Jacques Villon or Pignon: “all of the problems that today’s ‘subjectives’ pose for themselves (since there are subjectives) had already been dealt with in every possible way between 1880 and the end of the First World War by men named Seurat, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Derain”.¹⁷

Rebatet’s review of the Salon d’Automne in 1943 bestowed a specific label upon these artists of regression: “revolutionaries of the arrière-garde”. Of course, in Rebatet’s view, modernism had been vanquished by the artistic corollaries of the *Révolution Nationale* of the Vichy regime. Supported by fellow reactionary critics like Camille Mauclair, Rebatet favoured artists working in poetic and naturalistic realism, such as Maurice Utrillo.¹⁸ Rebatet’s derogatory stance was founded on a deliberate refusal to recognise the avant-gardes as a *tradition* worth emulating or reprising in contemporary terms, and satisfaction in seeing their repression by both the Vichy state and German occupation. Consequently, the “revolutionaries of the arrière-garde” are artists who idealistically believe that the modernism of the prewar avant-gardes remains a legitimate and radical pictorial language at the crucial moment when it has been surpassed and its failures fully revealed.

Notwithstanding Rebatet’s bias, his deployment of arrière-garde corresponds to a contentious but common understanding of the ontologically vexed situation for painting at mid-century. Notably, the exegetes of the *Jeunes peintres* group also framed the motivation for their synthetic

¹⁶ Jean-Marc Campagne, “Les Beaux-Arts: Esprit, es-tu là?”, in: *Les Nouveaux temps*, 19 February 1942, 3.

¹⁷ Lucien Rebatet, “Le Salon des Tuileries”, in: *Je suis partout*, 23 June 1944, 4: “tous les problèmes que se posent ou feignent de se poser les ‘subjectifs’ d’aujourd’hui, puisque subjectifs il y a, avaient été déjà retournés dans tous les sens, entre 1880 et la fin de l’autre guerre par des hommes qui se sont nommés Seurat, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Derain”.

¹⁸ See further Michèle Cone, “Vampires, Viruses, and Lucien Rebatet: Anti-Semitic Art Criticism during Vichy”, in: Linda Nochlin (ed.), *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, London 1995, 174-86.

experiments in depicting light and space through non-naturalistic colour as a return to vital, but as yet unfulfilled, resources for the renewal of painting. Their interrogation of the recent past is exemplified in a painting such as Estève's *Hommage à Cézanne* (1942), exhibited at the Galerie Friedland in 1942 in an exhibition entitled *Hommage aux anciens*. The luminous, golden-orange and purple toned studio interior is filled with the choreographed clutter familiar from Cézanne's own still-life compositions and, propped casually but centrally on the square-to-the viewer chair seat, a portrait of the admired ancestor gazing outwards. The mimicked motif of the studio interior – itself a form of self-portrait – returns the viewer to the 1890s as surely as the translucent, slipping and sliding planes of deliquescent colour-light in heightened, non-naturalistic hues, so close to full abstraction in the upper section of the canvas, denote the elapse of time between Cézanne's day and that of Estève and the *Jeunes peintres*. The image of the admired exemplar of a painter's painter, whose work pivots between the impressionist past of the 19th century and the radical experiments in representing time and space of the 20th, catalyses a second visualised shuttle between past and present. It provokes reflection on degrees of distance, and the process of transmission, as it is presented to us as a photographic reproduction (a page torn from a book) of a work of art, recognisably the artist's self-portrait.¹⁹

In early 1941 with the armistice declared, Bazaine had returned to Paris from the frontline in Lorraine and sought to reconvene an artistic collective dedicated to a new painting and a new spirit of community. In the first of a sequence of exhortative and exegetic articles, entitled "Guerres et évasions", he articulated an avant-gardist position, condemning those in the artworld who turn aside from the profound spiritual upheaval caused by the war: "At the rear, however, one adapted oneself rapidly to the circumstances. [...] In Paris the *union sacrée* of French art was declared: 'fauves' and 'pompiers' were ordered to embrace each other without disgust. All that was rather nauseating".²⁰ Bazaine then introduces

¹⁹ The subjective and partial mechanisms of transmission that construct a tradition are here revealed, as in comments by the *Jeunes peintres* themselves. The examples in this essay affirm points made by Howard Caygill in "The Present of Tradition", in: *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 3, October 1995, 293-9.

²⁰ Jean Bazaine, "Guerres et évasions", in: *Nouvelle Revue française*, 1, April 1941, reprinted in his *Le Temps de la peinture*, 23. "A l'arrière, cependant, on s'adaptait rapidement aux circonstances. [...] A Paris on décrétait l'union sacrée de l'art français: 'fauves' et 'pompiers' avaient ordre de s'étreindre sans dégoût. Tout cela était assez écoeurant". Bazaine refers to the collapse of operative distinctions between modernist artists working after the avant-garde pictorial innovations of the fauves, and their putative opposite, the "pompiers" artists. On the designation of pompiers to artists working in academic, conserva-



Fig. 2: Maurice Estève, *Hommage à Cézanne*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 81 x 116 cm.
Private collection. Artwork © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009

the *Jeunes peintres*, his generation of artists, who he says will refuse all compromise and enact the “harshes assault yet inflicted upon contemporary painting”. His call-to-arms evokes a welcoming society where the artist will no longer live in isolation but work as part of an “ideal collective” towards the civic good: “individualism-art, the art of revenge will have said its last word, and in front of us there will only remain a wide slippery slope which will lead us directly into the city. The artist in the city, after six centuries of solitude and evasion, what a temptation!”²¹

tive, and official modes, see Jacques Thuillier, *Peut-on parler d'une peinture « pompier » ?*, Paris 1984; and Adamson & Norris (eds.), *Academic, Pompier and Arrière-garde*.

²¹ Jean Bazaine, “Guerres et évasions”, in: *Le Temps de la peinture*, 19-27: “plus rude assaut qu’ait eu encore à subir la peinture vivante”. “l’art-individualisme, l’art-revanche aurait dit son dernier mot, et il ne resterait plus en face de nous qu’une large pente savonneuse qui nous mènerait droit dans la Cité. L’artiste dans la cité, après six siècles de solitude et d’évasion, quelle tentation!” Bazaine’s thinking should be contextualised by the debates at the Maison de la Pensée in 1936 on art and the public, and the pivotal question of realism versus abstraction; but also in rapport with his closeness to the Personalist philosopher Emmanuel Mounier and the thought of both Henri Bergson and Péguy. For instance, in “Marcel, Premier dialogue de la cité harmonieuse” (1898), Péguy describes the ideal city,

Bazaine's vision of transcendent supersession is, however, *arrière-garde* in its overt appeal to a set of seemingly original and pure virtues that will be retrieved and re-activated by the *Jeunes peintres*. In subsequent articles, Bazaine described their adherence to a revised kind of tradition, a *dangerous* tradition that re-binds French art to its authentic roots after some three hundred years of subjugation by Italian classicism (for even today the voyage to Rome is still considered a highlight of a young artist's career, he exclaims with disgust).²² Bazaine and his *Jeunes peintres* colleagues argued for a dynamic return to the original principles of painting, founded in non-naturalistic colour and expressive line upon a flat surface and true national origins, deriving from the dual models of pre-Renaissance art and the avant-gardes of the early 20th century.²³ In 1943 Bazaine concluded his "Recherches des jeunes peintres" by stating that both cubism (in liberating painting from one-point perspective) and fauvism (in purging extraneous elements and reducing colour and form to its essential and expressive purity) permit the painter today, at mid-century, an unlimited liberty in their means of conquest: "That's where French art is now, come full circle after ten centuries: virgin once again [...]"²⁴ Bazaine historicises modern art as a cyclical dynamic, where the tail meets with the head in a transcendental logic; the evolution of French art is seen to have come full circle in order to rediscover its original pictorial and social virtues.

Face to Face: The Past and the Present

After the war, nationalist critics like the young curator of the recently inaugurated Musée d'Art Moderne, Bernard Dorival, saw the *Jeunes peintres* as the "fatal and necessary" link in the "new tradition" after six black years. This link could not be taken for granted, however. The Louvre curator, Michel Florisoone, made a more subtle evaluation, noting the "flagrant conflict" between "classicism" (generally referring to naturalistic realism referring to traditional genres) and the new *irréaliste* painting as

where all wills are in harmony and none are foreign to the civic community. For a discussion of the reception of this idea, and of the role of the work of art as a pure model for free will, see Carroll, *French Literary Fascism*, 48-51.

²² Jean Bazaine, "Tour d'horizon", in: N.R.F. (August 1941), also in *Le Temps de la peinture*, 29.

²³ See Léon Gischia, "Recherche d'une tradition", in: *Les Problèmes de la peinture*, ed. Gaston Diehl, Paris 1945, 137-47, here 143.

²⁴ Jean Bazaine, "Recherches des jeunes peintres", in: *Formes et Couleurs* 6, 1943, also in *Le Temps de la peinture*, 41-2. "Voilà donc où en est cet art français après avoir, en dix siècles, accompli tout son cycle: vierge à nouveau".

consequence of a fragmented and heterochronious temporality. Florisoone observed that, deprived of references to the time-revered masterworks of the past with the closure of the state museums during the war years and forced into an interior and subjective meditation on their painterly means, young artists at the end of the war had been brusquely confronted by the prewar heroes and the return of the museum collections: "Thus all the pasts and all the presents find themselves, a unique occurrence in the annals of art history, face to face".²⁵

Florisoone's words evoke the heady brew of conflicting sentiments – nostalgia, regret, apprehension and hope – feeding the desire for the resurrection of the École de Paris. His viewing of the recent work of the *Jeunes peintres*, prompted him to describe the temporal dilemma facing artists dedicated to modernism as *neo-avant-garde*. Incapable of a *tabula rasa* rejection of the past – where the legendary icons in the Louvre (not yet burned down by the revolutionaries!) are amalgamated with the living modernist masters Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Léger, and Bissière – the neo-avant-garde must build upon the past, invent its own particular tradition strong enough to withstand the classical, and, simultaneously, surpass its forbears. As Florisoone sombrely warned:

Solitary games are over. The dead are coming to seize the living; the right to choose one's own ancestors has been taken away [...]. It will be necessary to start living again and above all creating under the implacable eye of the past, and to once more reckon with this witness and judge. And at the same time the present is organising, regrouping and unifying itself as if it were already historical.²⁶

For Florisoone, avant-garde is synonymous with the modernist breakthroughs accomplished by cubism and fauvism, and thus the neo-avant-garde must negotiate this paradigmatic legacy. Artists must shoulder this burden, the weighty onus of attending to the past, at a moment where the present is being experienced as a vacuum in time.

²⁵ Michel Florisoone, "La saison: face à face d'expositions", in: *L'Amour de l'Art*, VII, 1946, 209. "Ainsi tous les passés et tous les présents se trouvent, fait unique dans les annales de l'histoire de l'art, face à face".

²⁶ Florisoone, "La saison", 209. "Les jeux solitaires sont finis. Les morts viennent saisir les vifs; le droit est retiré de se choisir ses propres ancêtres, et l'art depuis deux mois redevient héréditaire. [...] Il va falloir recommencer à vivre, et à créer surtout, sous l'œil implacable du passé, et supporter à nouveau ce témoin et ce juge. Et voici qu'en même temps le présent s'organise, se groupe et s'unifie comme si déjà il était historique". The term 'neo-avant-garde' is used by Florisoone to describe the *Jeunes peintres* in his review of the Salon de Mai, in: *Arts*, 8 June 1945, 1.

Florissoone's labeling of the *Jeunes peintres* as a neo-avant-garde in 1945 presciently evokes recent art historical attention given to the self-conscious reiteration of modernist conventions by artists in the mid-to-late 1950s such as the Nouveaux Réalistes' (including Arman, César, Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely) experiments with the monochrome, collage and the readymade, and the institutional critique later made by artists such as Daniel Buren.²⁷ Though the historiographical focus is clearly different, like arrière-garde and with similar implications, the naming of artists as neo-avant-garde indicates the apprehension of an altered consciousness of time. The prefix "neo" suggests that the original avant-garde project is either complete or has been abandoned. It denotes the deliberate revision of recognisable innovations by artists at this difficult moment of reassessment of the past; and it also evokes the rupture in communication effected by the war between the prewar and postwar artistic communities of Paris, such that the ideals of any emergent avant-garde remain obliquely immanent. As Florissoone cautiously concluded his *compte-rendu* of the season, the task of comprehension given such temporal and spatial displacement is challenging: "because you cannot go back in time by following the traces of the others; it's only necessary to understand them".²⁸

The Quarrel of the Real

Between 1946 and 1953, the assessment of contemporary painting in the newspapers, art journals, and the academic discipline of art history was dominated by the "La Querelle du Réel" or the "Nouvelle Querelle des Images". Artists and art critics described an ontological and epistemological "battle" over the very nature of pictorial representation, where two opposed views of the public role and responsibilities of painting contested the right to the French tradition: the realistic representation of the object versus a non-objective or abstract art. This discursive battle over the nature and future of painting is that which constructs the postwar École

²⁷ Bürger, in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, derides the neo-avant-garde for a superficial attempt to rework avant-garde strategies; this analysis depends upon Bürger's particular definition of the "historical avant-garde", epitomised by surrealism. For important amplifications and revisions to Bürger's influential definition: Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?", in: *October*, 70, Fall 1984, re-printed in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (eds.), *The Duchamp Effect*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996, 5-32; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955-1975*, Cambridge, Mass. 2000; and David Hopkins (ed.), *Neo-Avant-Garde*, Amsterdam-New York 2006.

²⁸ "car on ne remonte pas le temps en suivant à rebours les traces des autres; il faut seulement les comprendre".

de Paris as a zone of aesthetic and political conflict. After the striving towards national and cultural consensus on reconstruction and the emphasis on civic engagement over and above political bias immediately after the war, in 1953 Descargues noted sadly that any semblance of unanimity had quickly dissolved: “it is as difficult to date exactly the moment when the artistic edifice fissured as when the nation fell back into division”.²⁹

Descargues’ essay for the *Premier Bilan de l’art actuel* entitled “Les Frontaliers” (Boundary-Dwellers) focuses upon painters like Bazaine, Manessier, Lapicque, Raoul Ubac and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva. All born after 1900 and educated at the independent art academies and in the galleries of *l’art vivant*, they first came to public notice during the 1930s and began the transition to a non-mimetic form of painting (often described as “non-figuration” to distinguish it from “non-objective”, geometric or “pure” abstraction that repudiates a model in the world of visual experience) during or just after the war, almost two decades or more after the advent of abstraction. Thus, in considering these apparent latecomers to abstraction, Descargues’ opening passage explicitly set up the stakes of a complex problematic that is ideological, material and temporal in nature: for wherein lies the avant-garde of the postwar moment in Europe? Which artists contribute to it by what artistic and ideological means? To answer these questions, Descargues analyses the work of a “group” without cohesion, who operate in the shadowy border zone between realist and abstract, rebuffing identification with either category. “It is here”, he says, “that the drama of the age is most clearly seen”.³⁰

In paintings that refuse to adhere to any clear-cut clan or *isme*, Descargues finds the blatant symptom of systemic collapse within art. His introductory claim, which began this essay, makes the crisis clear: “one seeks in vain the avant-garde and arrière-garde of modern art, the beginning and the end. The serpent eats its tail. For yet another day or for ten years, art goes in circles”. Considering this seemingly habitual use of arrière-garde, it might be supposed that Descargues, a self-confessed workaday journalist without a specialised education in art history, used it in straightforward opposition to the easily identifiable and privileged denominator, avant-garde. But Descargues does not refer to any of the highly conservative or apparently anachronistic styles of painting custom-

²⁹ Descargues, “Les Frontaliers”, 54: “il est aussi difficile de dater exactement le moment où l’édifice artistique se fissura que celui où la nation retomba dans la division”.

³⁰ Descargues, “Les Frontaliers”, 52. “C’est ici que le drame de l’époque se lit le plus clairement”.

arily positioned at the opposite pole to the avant-garde and most often decried as pompier, academic, or official; he did not add these clichéd descriptions to his essay, and the painters discussed by him do not belong in any of these attenuated categories. Nor, in undisputed counterpoint to Rebattet, did Descargues subscribe to any of the derogatory and defamatory ideological *parti pris* that suffuse the earlier example.

However, both critics are concerned with the fate of the tradition of painting – which, if it was still the object of violent fighting during the war years, is in 1953 seen to have foundered in irresolvable dispute. Evoking political vexation (that of republicanism and of civic community) in filigree within his meditation on the *Frontaliers*, Descargues' recognition of the dissolution of boundaries between avant-garde and arrière-garde implies a wistful knowledge that the necessary clarity of categories and principles of art-making which would enable critics and artists to define the direction of "progression" was irretrievably situated in the past. Descargues quotes Bazaine in his discussion of the essential dilemma for postwar painters: "What can be done faced with this freedom of invention, this plethora of solutions which are, at the same time, both our good fortune and our greatest danger?" He grimly noted, regarding the efforts of striving painters, all seeking escape from their temporal prison, that, "time is fatal to their works, made of successive disavowals".³¹ Neither artist nor critic took the limitless array of possibilities as an invitation to an open-house free-for-all, but rather as a symptom of "a sequence of categorical stands taken by painters, in opposition, which seems rather to confirm the profound disarray of their minds".³²

Les Frontaliers

In his influential essay published in 1949 titled *Notes sur la peinture*, Bazaine proposed a mediated route for painting that would circumvent rude realism, and equally sideline the kind of self-designated avant-garde painting he describes as "empty gestures of liberated force". He refers dismissively here to gestural abstraction, brushing aside the "false quarrel of abstract art" pitting the *chaud* (lyrical and gestural abstract painters) against

³¹ Descargues, "Les Frontaliers", 51. "Que faire en face de cette liberté d'invention, de cette pléthore de solutions qui sont, à la fois notre chance et notre plus grand danger?"; "le temps est funeste à leurs oeuvres, faites de reniements successifs".

³² Descargues, "Les Frontaliers", 50: "une suite de prises de positions catégoriques par les peintres, positions contraires, dont l'opposition semble assez révélatrice du désarroi profond des esprits".

the *froid* (geometric abstractionists) as “avant-garde academicism”. Bazaine aimed to redeem the practice of painting from “lazy solutions”, arguing instead that the redemptive road for painting could be found in non-figuration, where, even though mimetic resemblance is abandoned, painting retains its fundamental humanity through the pictorial translation and condensation of subjective vision.³³ But as Descargues admitted, distinguishing the non-figurative *frontalier* from the abstract was a judgement that only an initiated expert might attempt. The boundaries certainly appear porous, especially if the example of Nicolas de Staël is considered – illustrated in the *Premier Bilan* with a work entitled, and clearly depicting, *Les Bouteilles* (1952), but grouped by Vrinat and Gindertael in the abstract section amongst those who push further into abstraction with concentration upon the sensual and material qualities of paint.³⁴

Nicolas de Staël deliberately broke with figuration in 1943 following his introduction to Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Jean Arp, Le Corbusier and Alberto Magnelli, as well as Wassily Kandinsky.³⁵ In February 1944 he exhibited alongside César Domela and Kandinsky at Galerie Jeanne Bucher and again in the spring at Galerie L'Esquisse with Domela, Kandinsky and Magnelli in an exhibition entitled simply *Peintures Abstraites*, followed by the inclusion of a major, large-scale painting, *Astronomie-Composition*, in the inaugural Salon de Mai in 1945. The paintings of the 1940s are relatively large, often done with a knife or trowel that spread the sombrely-hued pigments and shaped them into irregular, geometric planes that clash in immobile and oblique collisions, here broken apart and there held in tension by thickly drawn, angular contours. Quickly noticed by critics, De Staël's abstract work was greeted as a harbinger of a new avant-

³³ All quotes drawn from *Notes sur la peinture* (1949), re-printed in Bazaine, *Le Temps de la peinture*, 80-105.

³⁴ Robert Vrinat, “L'Art Abstrait (Seconde Naissance)”, in: *Premier Bilan de l'Art Actuel 1937-1953*, 21.

³⁵ Nicolas de Staël was born in 1914 in St Petersburg. He obtained French nationality in 1948 and died in 1955 in Antibes. The key reference work is Françoise de Staël, *Nicolas de Staël: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, Neuchâtel 1997, hereafter abbreviated to CR. On his break with figuration, see De Staël to Emmanuel Fricero, 5 January 1943, CR, 831-2; see also *Nicolas de Staël*, Paris 2003, especially the essay by Jean-Paul Ameline, “Funambulisme entre figuration et abstraction: Nicolas de Staël face à la critique”.

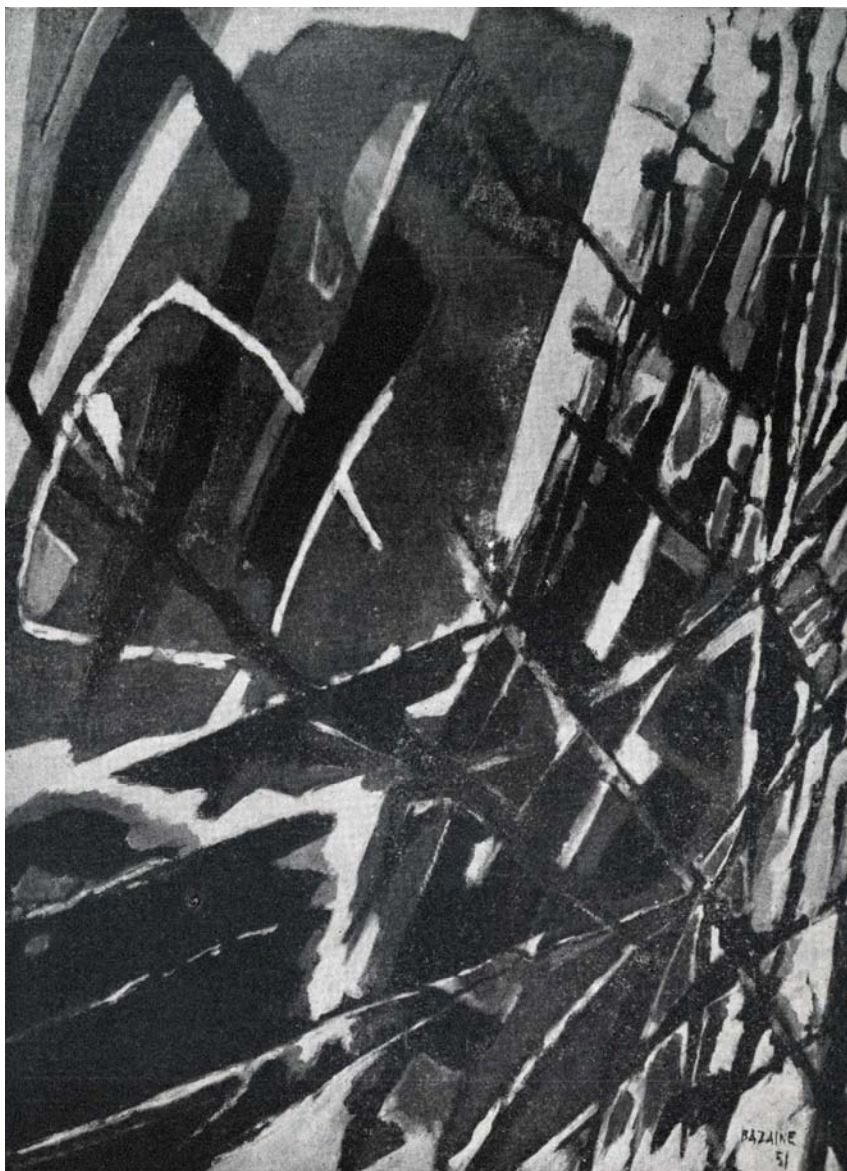


Fig. 3: Jean Bazaine, *La Clairière*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm. Henie-Onstad Art Centre, Høvikodden, Norway. Reproduced in the *Premier Bilan*, p. 57.
Artwork © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009

garde, a second generation of innovators including Hans Hartung, Pierre Soulages and Bram Van Velde, reconstructing abstraction for the postwar situation. As De Staël himself acknowledged, and Gindertael affirmed in his *Premier Bilan* essay: “the ‘abstract’ pictorial fact became an *accepted acquisition* that conditioned new generations to a *different situation*, of which it appears young artists now are more and more aware”.³⁶ In his biographical entry in the *Premier Bilan* in 1953, De Staël’s compatriot, Serge Poliakoff, asserted that he never expected to see in his lifetime the renaissance of figuration, or an abstract artist revert to figuration.³⁷

De Staël’s allegiance to the abstract cause was, however, always subject to question. Less than a year after his admonition to Lecuire, he thanked Dorival, curator at the Musée d’Art Moderne, for having set his work apart from the “gang de l’abstraction avant”.³⁸ He refuted the notion of an abstract picture whose existence could be theorised prior to receiving visual stimulus from the world of objects, affirming this lesson in paintings from 1951-1952 whose titles alert the viewer to their materialism – *Rectangles jaunes et vertes* – and to their affiliation with the roofs, paving stones, and facades of the city streets. From 1952, De Staël’s titles referred directly to the subject in the series of celebrated canvases treating *Les Toits*, *Les Footballeurs*, *Paysages*, and *Natures Mortes* whilst the blocks of thick paint clearly delineate their referent, as do the late works where the paint is applied in loosely outlined, liquid washes.

Though some critics (and, no doubt, artists) experienced De Staël’s “return” to figuration as a betrayal, his late work was widely admired for its denial of the antinomy between abstract and realist in order to propose a new kind of figuration retaining a recognisable engagement with the direct experience of the world without succumbing to naturalism.³⁹ Dorival described De Staël as “the Manet of our times” for his success in merging tradition and the modern, perfecting a synthesis between the abstract and the concrete in a reconciliatory transcendence of the two ap-

³⁶ Roger van Gindertael, “L’art ‘abstrait’. Nouvelle situation”, in: *Premier Bilan*, 35: “le fait pictural ‘abstrait’ est devenu un *fait acquis* qui conditionne pour les nouvelles générations une *situation différente* dont il semble bien que les jeunes artistes prennent de mieux en mieux conscience”.

³⁷ Serge Poliakoff, in: *Premier Bilan*, 314.

³⁸ De Staël to Bernard Dorival, September 1950, *CR*, 906. Germain Viatte states that De Staël’s designation refers to the lyrical abstraction of Pierre Soulages, Hans Hartung, and especially that of Wols, Georges Mathieu and the emergence of what would soon be called “tachisme”.

³⁹ At the moment when the death of the École de Paris was widely touted, Pierre Courthion argued that “De Staël reste le peintre capital de sa génération”, in: *Arts*, 9-15, December 1964, 27.



Fig. 4: Nicolas de Staël, *Bouteilles, harmonie en rose et bleu*, 1952. Oil on canvas, 54 x 73 cm. Private Collection. *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, no. 350; reproduced in the *Premier Bilan*, page 32. Artwork © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009

proaches to representation.⁴⁰ Marcel Arland lauded *Les Grands Footballeurs* as a superb reconciliation: “in the end, it is not the least importance of this work that it reunites, conciliates, and surpasses abstract and figurative tendencies”.⁴¹ However, the art historian André Chastel observed that De Staël was attempting a miracle: to permit painting to exist as an engagement with the real, and at the same time, to forget appearances and testify to imaginative creation.⁴² De Staël acknowledged the Icarian challenge in a letter to Douglas Cooper in January 1955: “Painting, true painting, always

⁴⁰ Bernard Dorival, “Nicolas de Staël et Léon Gischia”, in: *La Table Ronde*, 80, August 1954, 175–6.

⁴¹ Marcel Arland, “Nicolas de Staël”, in: *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 41, 1956, 905: “ce n’est pas enfin la moindre portée de cette oeuvre, qu’elle réunisse, concilie et dépasse les tendances abstraite et figurative”.

⁴² André Chastel, “Au musée d’art moderne: Nicolas de Staël”, in: *Le Monde*, 24 February 1956, 6.

tends towards all viewpoints, that is to say, to the impossible combination of the present instant, the past and the future".⁴³

The discussion of De Staël's work that followed his death in 1955 and career retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne in 1956 emphasises the degree to which art criticism – and, in this case, the artist himself – constructed an arrière-garde paradigm by which to write the contemporary history of painting. De Staël's heroicised efforts to transcend the operative dichotomy between realism and abstraction, and to reintegrate tradition into a non-mimetic visual language, furnished critics with a superbly demonstrative vehicle for painting's crisis of representation. Aided by the mythologised bohemian narrative of his travails, art critics subsequently assumed the grandiose failure of any attempt to reconcile such ontologically defined opposites. The passionate defender of "pure" abstraction, Léon Degand, suggested a tragic end had been previewed in 1953 at the Salon de Mai with the enormous *Bouteilles dans l'atelier*: "Who was he trying to fool by this revival of fauvism and gigantism of format? [...] On what sterile adventure was he embarking?"⁴⁴

De Staël's subscription to an arrière-garde understanding of painting's situation, and his struggle to resolve the formal tensions between figuration and abstraction, was seen to have placed an intolerable strain upon him. De Staël's letters, with their frequent comments on paintings seen during his study trips, testify to a lifelong habit of reflection on tradition and the past masters of painting. Despite this investment in the past, Jan Ulatowski in "L'impossible retour" for *Preuves*, concluded that the only kind of relationship young artists in the mid-1950s have to their forebears is an artificial and partial memorisation, haunted by the absence of a direct and authentic web of connections that would nurture the organic continuation of the tradition of painting. Consequently, he diagnosed the artist's suicide as symptomatic of a prevalent condition: "young artists have lost sight of the horizons of their elders to such a degree that their highest hopes are already turning into the deepest nostalgia".⁴⁵ The young art critic and poet Alain Jouffroy likewise proposed that De Staël was

⁴³ De Staël to Douglas Cooper, January 1955, CR, 1244. "La peinture, la vraie, tend toujours à tous les aspects, c'est-à-dire à l'impossible addition de l'instant présent, du passé et de l'avenir".

⁴⁴ Léon Degand, "Les Expositions à Paris", in: *Aujourd'hui*, 7, March 1956, 14. "Qui prétendait-il bluffer par cette ressucée du fauvisme et ce gigantisme du format? [...] Dans quelle stérile aventure s'engageait-il?"

⁴⁵ Jan Ulatowski, "L'impossible retour", in: *Preuves*, 63, May 1956, 76. "Les jeunes ont perdu de vue les rivages de leurs aînés, à tel point que leur espoir le plus haut tourne déjà à la nostalgie la plus profonde".

imprisoned within a formalist “aesthetic of impossibility” that condemned him to aspire to avant-garde heroicism, but deprived him of a “personal mythology” sufficient to prevent acute despair.⁴⁶

The École de Paris: A Postwar Arrière-garde

In 1953, Descargues’ description of *les frontaliers* positions them at a juncture in time when the contingent positions of avant-garde and arrière-garde ceased to be meaningful. By 1956, the posthumous reception of De Staël’s late work encapsulated the pessimistic view that painting had become a reiterative practice, betrayed by a temporal structure of delay and anachronism, and obsessed with the avant-garde phantom of originality. Descargues’ discussion, ten years after Lucien Rebatet’s complaint that young artists still considered the achievements of heroic modernism worth emulating in order to progress; the critics’ chorus surrounding the *œuvre* of Nicolas de Staël; and the collective set of commentaries and manifestoes in the *Premier Bilan de l’Art Actuel*, all participate in the discursive entity entitled the “École de Paris”. The postwar painters, critics, and curators of the École de Paris worked in service to avant-garde ideals that were feared censured or lost, and that bound modernism to the ideology of tradition. The art critical expression of an acute temporal dilemma highlights a fundamental point about the postwar École de Paris. It demonstrates how it functioned conceptually as an arrière-garde in seeking to regain the ground lost by painting during the interwar period and *les années noires* on both the aesthetic and political terrain, looking back and attempting to reinvent the resources of the recent past, to restore the progressive viability and status of painting as an artform that might *act* in the experience of life.

The critical reflection upon avant-garde ideals and practices in regard to painting, and upon its role as a national tradition, engaged its participants in an evaluation of the terms, categories, principles and ideals of their predicament – as much as it requires our attention today. As Descargues wearily pointed out, this will be the task of art history:

I can’t remember who hastily predicted that historians of the future would harshly judge the disagreements that we so carefully nurture, the boundaries that we maintain between painters. This fusion of tendencies is underway. Why? Because there is no longer an avant- nor arrière-garde; because all the painters, no

⁴⁶ Alain Jouffroy, “Situation de la jeune peinture à Paris”, in: *Preuves*, 68, October 1956, 28.

matter which side they are on, all feel the same expressive difficulty. The arts, I have argued, live in the form of a circle.⁴⁷

Both then and now, the critics and historians of the École de Paris – and more generally, of painting in Europe in the postwar period – have negatively decried the seemingly reiterative painting practices. This essay restores a more complex and important context to the ruling debates of the day, to show that the artists and critics working in Paris in the aftermath of the war were not bereft of a self-reflexive and critical consciousness in regard to their own compressed, contradictory and crisis-ridden politics of time. A fundamentally temporal, and hence material, crisis traversed the practice of painting, prior to and concomitant with, the critical strategies offered by neo-avant-gardes (the Nouveaux Réalistes), or the revival of revolutionary avant-gardism by the Situationist Internationale. The critical reception of the *Jeunes peintres*, the mediating strategies of Descargues’ “boundary-dwellers”, or the heroicised anguish of De Staël as he confronted the recalcitrant objects of painting and the world, all indicate that arrière-garde must be included amongst the critical terms that permit historians to accurately gauge the options, positions, and situations for art-making after 1945.

⁴⁷ Descargues, “Les Frontaliers”, 51. “Je ne sais plus qui prédisait, que, pressés, les historiens de l’avenir feraient un sort cruel aux différends que nous entretenons soigneusement, aux frontières que nous creusons entre les peintres. Cette fusion des tendances est en train de s’opérer. Pourquoi? Parce qu’il n’y a plus d’avant ni d’arrière-garde; parce que tous les peintres, de quelque bord qu’ils soient ressentent tous la même difficulté d’expression. Les arts disions-nous vivent en forme de cercle”.

How We Look and Read: The European Avant-Garde's Imprint on 20th-Century Theory¹

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Gertrude Stein allegedly complained to Pablo Picasso that the portrait he made of her scarcely resembled her. Picasso replied that this was unimportant, that it would come with time.² Nearly a century later, Picasso's words have a loud ring of truth to them. It has indeed taken critics and theorists of both literature and the arts a while to come to terms with the work of the historical avant-gardes and experimental modernists. Yet today, as critics and theorists, our common ways of looking and reading are hard to imagine without the advent of both experimental modernism and the historical avant-gardes.

Contemporary art theorists, according to Daniel Herwitz, are perhaps the clearest “inheritors of the avant-garde's theoretical norms”.³ One of the basic traits art critics at large share, often unwittingly, with the historical avant-gardes is that like the work of the latter the former frequently put forth claims about art in general based on a single work of art. Just as Piet Mondrian's or Marcel Duchamp's exploits, in their complex reflection on the materiality of their work's components, experimented with the possibilities of the plastic arts in general, critics too nowadays commonly study “paintings [...] not as the bearers of innocent retinal values but as complex semiological codes whose visual effects are to be glossed as information requiring deep theoretical analysis”, informed by the assump-

¹ This article is a thoroughly reworked version of an essay to appear in Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Parsons and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, Oxford 2010. I would like to thank the editors of that book for their critical comments.

² See Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Sussex 1978, 33.

³ Daniel Herwitz, *Making Theory/Constructing Art . On the Authority of the Avant-Garde*, Chicago 1993, 1.

tion that “a unique art example can [...] perfectly illustrate” essential facts about art.⁴

Perhaps yet another remnant of a Christian culture in a secularised world, that same assumption can also be encountered in literary theory, which will form my main subject here. Writers like Joyce, as part of an Anglophone experimental modernist avant-garde matched on the continent by the historical avant-gardes, are regularly taken as a *cas limite* in literary theory as well. The works of such writers too engage in a thorough reflection on the materiality of language and writing. For better or worse associated with a sense of “difficulty”,⁵ these works have also very often been a test case in 20th-century literary theory as it aimed to further research on the nature of writing in general. As such, literary theory has to an extent always been a peculiar branch of modernism, but especially avant-garde, studies. It is quite hard to imagine the denouement of the so-called “sociology of literature” without the avant-garde, for example. From Georg Lukács (who time and again condemned and expressionism to back up his theory of literature) to first and subsequent generations in Critical Theory (Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Peter Bürger, and Jürgen Habermas – to name but a few) and up to the more recent systems-theorist Niklas Luhmann: all of these theorists, when it comes to defining the nature of literature in general, draw to the fore the historical avant-gardes as a historical phenomenon allegedly capturing all there is to know about texts *in context*. Today still we read these critics and most of their approaches are still operative, not, though, as theories of modernism/the avant-garde, but as theories of literature in general. Similarly, by turning to just a selection of theories of textuality developed in the foregoing century, as I will do here, it becomes rather apparent that today our understanding of literature *as text* is the result of a whole series of singular readers' responses to singular avant-garde texts. Hence, just as art theorists regularly draw on the avant-garde as an “art intensified”, theorists of literature in the past century too have tended to approach avant-garde writing as a “literature intensified”.

Charting 20th-century theory's indebtedness to the avant-gardes, in particular when it comes to notions of textuality, will be my first objective here. In so doing I do not claim to exhaustiveness. Rather, this article can be seen as an attempt to begin a more general survey of the ways in which the historical avant-gardes and experimental modernists have left their mark on theory, and thus also on the way we look at literature in general.

⁴ Herwitz, *Making Theory*, 1-2, 5.

⁵ Leonard Diepeveen, *Difficulties of Modernism*, New York 2003.

This in turn ties in with my second objective here, namely to relate my admittedly selective survey to debates about the alleged “decline” of the avant-garde in more recent times.

From Avant-Garde Texts to “Literature”

Modernism and literary theory, as a distinct academic discipline within the humanities, came about almost simultaneously. Early 20th-century literary studies, Ezra Pound once noted, consisted only of “allegedly scientific methods”.⁶ Pound’s note was symptomatic of a wide-spread malaise in literary studies around the turn of the century. Allen Tate, drawing on T.E. Hulme, claimed that “historicism, scientism, psychologism, biologism, in general the confident use of scientific vocabularies in the spiritual realm, ha[d] created or at any rate [wa]s the expression of a spiritual disorder. That disorder may be briefly described as a dilemma”.⁷ Tate’s dilemma derived from a lack of confidence the humanities displayed when faced with critiques coming from “hard” scientists questioning the humanities’ methods. It further alluded to the paradoxical way in which literary studies in particular had legitimised itself in the past; since around 1900 it lacked any method or theory of its own. Literary studies in the course of the 19th century had indeed mainly drawn on other disciplines in the humanities. Linguistics had allowed for a “reduction” of literature to what fell within the confines of single or “natural” languages; while (Romantic) politics and (positivist) history had led to a restriction of literature’s scope to “natural” national boundaries, canons and histories.

Despite the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism in modernism at large, it clearly questioned the tenets of 19th-century linguistics from outside academia. Firmly rooted within academia, yet increasingly disappointed by modernism’s failure after the Great War to bring about a truly cross-cultural dialogue in the public space at large,⁸ I.A. Richards argued in *Poetry and Science* (1923) that literature required its own method of study. His assertion was arguably not novel. What was distinctive was how Richards, along with other New Critics on both sides of the Atlantic, defined his model: he performed a *mise en abyme*, creating a space in the university where texts could be studied in a way “equivalent to the

⁶ Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot, London 1954, p. 19.

⁷ Allen Tate, “The Present Function of Literary Criticism”, in: *On the Limits of Poetry. Selected Essays, 1928-1948*, New York 1948, 4.

⁸ See Rodney Koeneke, *Empires of the Mind: I. A. Richards and Basic English in China, 1929-1979*, Stanford 2004.

scientist's escape from life into the laboratory".⁹ "This scientific pose, conscious or unconscious, [...] constituted one of the main strengths of New Criticism" as it launched literary studies as a distinct "scientific" or academic discipline within Anglo-American academia.¹⁰ Meanwhile, on the other side of the globe, Russian Formalists too, by isolating literary language within everyday speech, responded to their academic culture, which was pervaded by positivism and a tendency to read literary (especially realist) texts as secondary historical documents.¹¹ Both in the West and the East literary theory thus established itself in the shadow of modernism as a scholarly field in its own right, prefiguring the later formula "literary study should be specifically literary".¹²

That such "purism", this call for a "professional" theory of textuality, coincided with a kindred concern to bring out the materiality of language and writing in the historical avant-gardes is well-known. Perhaps more openly than in New Criticism, for example, many canonical texts of early 20th-century Russian Formalism remind us of the fact that Formalism concurred with the historical avant-gardes. Today it is stating the obvious to say that the ideas of "estrangement" and "defamiliarisation" originate from the Formalists' response to Russian futurism, for instance. The Formalists themselves made no secret of their close ties to the avant-garde, neither in practice – publishing in modernist journals, or, as in the case of Jakobson, even working with them as a poet under the pseudonym Aljagrov – nor in their analytical work. Boris Eichenbaum in *Melodies of Russian Lyrical Verse* (1922) and Jury Tynianov in *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924) explicitly referred to futurism as their inspiration. So did Viktor Shklovsky, while Jakobson's work "only properly took off in the wake of the avant-garde".¹³ Indeed, we know that Jakobson and others were friends with poets such as Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh who together with Vladimir Majakovsky are commonly regarded as the most important figures in Russian futurism.¹⁴ Formalism however also frequently turned to dada and (later) to surrealism and various other avant-garde movements and canonised writers of modern-

⁹ Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds. An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*, "Overseas Editions", New York 1942, 357.

¹⁰ J.H. Raleigh, "The New Criticism as an Historical Phenomenon", in: *Comparative Literature*, 1, Winter 1959, 23.

¹¹ See Mikhail Bakhtin and P.N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, tr. A.J. Wehrle, Baltimore 1978[1928], 57-9.

¹² Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, London 1955, v.

¹³ Dora Vallier, "Dans le vif de l'avant-garde", in: *L'Arc*, 2, April 1990, 10, my translation.

¹⁴ See Kristina Pomorska, *Russian Formalism and its Poetic Ambivalence*, The Hague 1968, 93-118.

ism.¹⁵ In other words, Formalism in Russia can be read as the first comparative avant-garde (if not modernist) theory proper.

Still, today we remember Russian Formalism above all as a general theory of literature, because its practitioners quickly began defining literature as a whole as a special type of language foregrounding its own materiality or “literariness”. They thus generalised features first encountered in modernism, highlighting nearly all of the formal techniques commonly attributed today to the modernist avant-gardes; from phonemic and syntactical play to collage and montage and generic experimentation.¹⁶ These semiotic and largely anti-mimetic modulations (or “grammatical games”, as Mikhail Bakhtin polemically called them¹⁷) drew attention to conventional *devices* in literary language at large. Classical realism, so it became clear to Formalists *through modernism*, was merely one system, code or style harnessing conventionalised *procédés*. Romanticism equally housed a number of such reiterated devices. This illustrated that modern literature is a textual entity in its own right, different in structure and organisation from, yet akin to, everyday speech. Like everyday language, literature at times manages to convey a mimetic or referential moment, for instance. But it does so through special semiotic structures, showing us how “meaning” in literature is a symbolic construction or reiteration.

With these and other insights Russian Formalism informed a large number of later currents in literary theory, most of which are still operative today. Unlike the prevalent tradition in 19th-century literary studies to limit inquiries to national literatures, Formalism during the 1910s and 1920s lay at the heart of a “Europeanization of [...] literary scholarship”¹⁸ and cleared the path for a truly comparative approach to literature, a prerequisite for making claims about literature in general. The Leningrad OPAYAZ group and its Moscow companion would in the 1930s flow into structuralism in Prague,¹⁹ to find an ally in Anglo-American New Criticism later on, and thence to form the basis of semiological approaches to literature after the Second World War.²⁰ Czech structuralism, to pick one example here, owed much to Formalism. It developed a number of tools that specifically helped to refine literary

¹⁵ Richard Bradford, *Roman Jakobson. Life, Language, Art*, London-New York 1994, 36, 113.

¹⁶ See František William Galan, *Historic Structures: the Prague School Project, 1928-1946*, London 1985.

¹⁷ Bakhtin and Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, 57-9.

¹⁸ From an essay in Russian by N. I. Efimov, quoted in Victor Erlich's translation from *Russian Formalism. Theory-Doctrine*, Paris-The Hague 1955, 286.

¹⁹ Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism. A Metapoetics*, Ithaca-London 1984.

²⁰ Thomas Sebeok, *Style in Literature*, Cambridge, Mass. 1960.

historiography. Here I need but refer to Tynjanov's *Archaisty i novátory* of 1929. I give the transliteration of the original title to draw attention to its symptomatic Italian translation as *Avanguardia e tradizione*.²¹ With Tynjanov's Formalist study, the term "avant-garde" – or better: *avant-gardism* – began to denote literature's perpetual game of distinction, its incessant tendency to denaturalise or defamiliarise existing literary codes and systems. Structuralists as well as other critics to this day reiterate the idea that modernism estranges or denaturalises,²² that is, it prevents us from seeing the text *as* natural or *in* a "natural" way. "Natural" here can be understood in a double sense, however. To the early Formalists, who tried to oppose the historicist trend in literary scholarship, "natural" was regarded in a synchronic fashion, as "mimetic" or "conventionalised, everyday" – and thus also as realist conventions. The emphasis on the diachronic came later, in a perspective which saw the "natural" as synonymous with "traditional". Favouring this second historical sense, structuralists promoted avant-garde denaturalisation, or avant-gardism, to a conceptual model of use to the historiography of modern literature since the emergence of Romanticism. Avant-garde literature's consciously and continuously differentiating reactions to its predecessors – Jury Lotman's "aesthetics of opposition" – quickly showed itself to be at work in other forms of writing as well.²³ Notions such as "defamiliarisation" or "avant-gardism", when used to-day, thus perform an ambiguous function. On the one hand we know they originated from singular responses to experimental modernist texts. Yet on the other hand they have come to function as "naturalised" concepts in a general theory of literature and in the practice of literary history.

Perhaps some of the historical avant-garde's exponents already recognised this ambiguity when they criticised Formalism. In the West, surrealist André Breton, for instance, firmly protested against the execution of Zavis Kalandra, a critic who, under Stalin, had dared to question the Formalist inspired work of Jan Mukarovsky and Czech structuralism for their *more geometrico* (deductive method).²⁴ In the East, structuralism

²¹ Jurij Tynjanov, *Avanguardia e tradizione* (Introduzione di Viktor Sklovskij), tr. Sergio Leone, Bari 1968.

²² See, for example, Vladimir Krysinski's chapter in Christian Berg, Frank Durieux and Geert Lernout (eds.), *The Turn of the Century. Modernism and Modernity in Literature and the Arts*, Berlin 1995, 17–32.

²³ Peter Zima illustrates that the idea of "avant-gardism" encountered here can be traced in all later structuralist theory (from Czech structuralism, reader-response criticism to semiotics). See Peter V. Zima, *The Philosophy of Modern Literary Theory*, London 1999, 63.

²⁴ Galan, *Historic Structures*, 61.

indeed turned increasingly sterile, mainly because of the steady rise of totalitarianism. As off-springs of Eastern structuralism cropped up in the centre (Prague) and the North (the Tartu School) of Europe,²⁵ structuralism also gradually had to defend itself against critics within the academic institution. Take the case of the already mentioned Mukarovsky. In his famous essay “Art as a Semiotic Fact” (1934) he noted: “The surrealist poem makes it incumbent upon the reader to imagine virtually the entire contexture of the theme, whereas the classical poem all but precludes the free-play of subjective associations due to its exactness of expression”.²⁶ Remarkable in this passage is the almost gratuitous way in which Mukarovsky universalised his personal reader-response to the surrealist text. Mukarovsky indeed grounded his poetic or aesthetic reading of a single surrealist poem in a “uniform, collective conscience”. Later structuralists like Michael Riffaterre questioned this universalisation, and pointed to the complexity of readers’ responses to such texts. In his essay “Compulsory Reader Response: The Intertextual Drive” (1990), also discussing a poetic text of Breton, Riffaterre substituted for Mukarovsky’s “universal consciousness” the concept of “intertextuality”, which explained “above all that the most important component of the literary work of art, indeed the key to the interpretation of its significance, should be found outside that work, beyond its margins”.²⁷ Whether Breton would have approved of Riffaterre’s correction of Mukarovsky is an issue we can only speculate about. What we can say with certainty is that Riffaterre’s stress on intertextuality was evidence of post-structuralism’s influence as it had previously bended the rules of interpretation.

Post-structuralists, like Formalists before them, made no secret of their indebtedness to the avant-gardes. It is well known that Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic views throughout his career were considerably influenced by surrealism, and that Lacan at a young age, like his Russian companions, often frequented vanguard circles.²⁸ Yet the majority of post-

²⁵ For the geographical spread of Formalism and structuralism, see Ann Shukmann, *Literature and Semiotics*, Amsterdam 1977, 8-37.

²⁶ Jan Mukarovsky, “Art as a Semiotic Fact”, in: *Structure, Sign, and Function*, ed. John Burbank and Peter Steiner, New Haven 1978, 84.

²⁷ Michael Riffaterre, “Compulsory Reader Response: The Intertextual Drive”, in: Michael Worton and Judith Still (eds.), *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, Manchester 1990, 76.

²⁸ Lacan’s encounter with Salvador Dalí in 1930 was crucial to his early writings. Others associated with surrealism, including René Crevel, Georges Bataille and Roger Caillouis also influenced his subsequent thinking. See Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985*, London 1990, and Carolyn Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan and the History of the Decentered Self*, Ithaca 1992.

structuralists were not contemporaries of the historical avant-gardes. They saw themselves post-factum as affiliates of experimental modernists. Various scholars working in (the wake of) post-structuralism identify explicitly with the modernist avant-gardes. Whereas Thomas Docherty in *After Theory* (1990) has the “pretensions [...] to be in a kind of avant-garde”,²⁹ Jean-Michel Rabaté goes a step further to argue not for a “theory of literature but *as* literature”.³⁰ Even Hayden White at one point proposed that literary historians examine “the possibility of using ... surrealists” modes of representation”.³¹ As Valentine Cunningham observes, the European avant-garde is thus to be regarded as the true “pre-history” of post-structuralism.³² And, as Gregory Ulmer aptly summarises, post-structuralism was to the theory of literary criticism what modernism and the avant-garde were to the history of literature. “The break with the assumptions of ‘realism’”, declared Ulmer, “is now underway (belatedly) in criticism”.³³

20th-century continental theories of textuality succeeding Formalism indeed mostly stuck to the parameters Formalists had set out: (*anti*-)*mimesis* and *semiosis*, literature's ability to unmask the self-evidence of reference through its violation of linguistic convention. This was mainly because Russian Formalism, complemented by the semiology of Saussure in structuralism, later on also provided a breeding ground not only for Claude Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and French narratology, but also for Lacan and Derrida.³⁴ Both the continuity and rupture presented by these later thinkers can be concisely illustrated by looking at the French journal *Tel Quel*, which flourished in the so-called “age of Theory”, between 1960 and 1982.³⁵ *Tel Quel*, says Susan Rubin Suleiman, “for a few years came closest to espousing the [...] revolutionary project of the historical avant-garde”,³⁶ and highlights how post-structuralist theory first took a step backward in

²⁹ Thomas Docherty, *After Theory. Postmodernism/Postmarxism*, London 1990, 1.

³⁰ See Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory*, London 2002, 117-40.

³¹ White as quoted in Gregory Ulmer, “The Object of Post-Criticism”, in: Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Port Townsend, Wash. 1982, 83.

³² Valentine Cunningham, *Reading After Theory*, London 2002, 80.

³³ Ulmer, “The Object of Post-Criticism”, 83.

³⁴ J.G. Merquior, *From Prague to Paris. A Critique of Structuralist and Post-structuralist Thought*, London 1986.

³⁵ I rely on three historical accounts of the journal here: Niilo Kauppi, *The Making of an Avant-Garde: Tel Quel*, Berlin 1994, Philippe Forest, *Histoire de Tel Quel*, Paris 1995, and Patrick Ffrench (ed.), *From Tel Quel to L'Infini: The Avant-Garde and After*, London 1998. In addition, my assessment of *Tel Quel* here is much indebted to Rabaté, *The Future of Theory*.

³⁶ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent. Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde*, New Haven 1990, 33-4.

order to move forward. While its *litterateurs* gradually turned against their modernist predecessors in an act of avant-gardism, its theoreticians in the end got the better of its writers by correcting Formalist readings of these same modernist predecessors.

Tel Quel initially disseminated a theory and practice of literary structuralism. Structuralism, at the risk of stating the obvious, found its inspiration not just in Formalism but in part also in the linguistics of Saussure. Saussure had claimed that words are meaningful not because they refer to something *outside* language, but because of the way they relate to each other *within* language, in binary oppositions and in other relationships of difference. In the wake of Saussure, structuralism set out to devise a “Grand Theory” of language, an exhaustive description of the *langue*, the structure or system grounding humanity’s knowledge as shaped through its linguistic perception of the world. In line with structuralism *Tel Quel* initially saw the relationship between language and what it referred to as arbitrary, and it set itself the task of promoting texts which could make this felt. *Tel Quel*’s editors, led by Philippe Sollers, made room for a discussion of the *nouveau roman* and gave a platform to Francis Ponge. In the course of the early 1960s the editors also began questioning the very nature of literature, that is to say, of “literariness”, seeing the European avant-gardes and Russian Formalists as precursors of a theory of the system grounding literary language. Only then, from the mid-1960s onward, could a more radical post-structuralist stance take shape in the review’s columns.

Whereas the advent of structuralism is now frequently called the “linguistic turn”,³⁷ post-structuralism could be called a “cultural turn”, since the latter radically thought through the implications of structuralist linguistics in the broader terms of history and culture. In many ways post-structuralism turned (structuralism) against structuralism, most notably by exposing that its attempt to devise a “Grand Theory” of language for the emancipation of humanity was a fallacy. Thinking through structuralism’s premises, post-structuralists logically pointed out that outside the language system there could be no such thing as “mankind” or “humanity”, and they thus appeared to undermine the humanist dimension in structuralism. Post-structuralism further questioned the rigidity of binary logic in structuralism, arguing that opposites here always imply one another and thus also always carry “traces” of their counterparts within themselves.

³⁷ The linguistic turn is of course often located earlier in modernism too. See Michael Bell, “The Metaphysics of Modernism”, in: Micheal Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, Cambridge 1999, 16 and further.

Accordingly, Jacques Derrida's insight of "différance" shifted attention to the (written) context of the enunciation of words and sounds, since only there could the inherent "undecidability" of the language system or structure be exposed. Post-structuralism, in short, was not so much concerned with systems or structures as it was with the processes and forces which opened these systems up. And it proved quite successful at this, as it drew on and re-evaluated Formalism to elevate the concept of "literariness" to a model of language in general. Or as Derrida phrased it in *Dissemination* (1972): "This is no – or hardly any, ever so little – literature",³⁸

Post-structuralism's continued inquiry into literature's (anti-)mimetic and semiotic qualities also brought about a far more radical attitude toward realism. For post-structuralists, and not least for those working in and around *Tel Quel*, "Realism [was ... a] form of representation, constructed and constructing practices, that characteristically (like the accompanying panoply of legitimating theoretical ideas) presented the forms as if they were substances or, in the well-known [...] formulation, 'convert culture into nature'. Literary realism in short was the cultural brother of ideology or more accurately was itself an ideological operator performing the primary task of ideology: naturalising socially and historically produced systems of meaning".³⁹ More than their structuralist forerunners, post-structuralists thus saw realism as coinciding with a dominant mode of perception embedded in modern culture. They thereby elevated realism from a literary code or style (as in Formalism) to a mode of perception characteristic of everyday speech and commonsense ideology as such, and their objective, unsurprisingly, became to show that even classical realist texts in fact form part of an intertextual field that makes mimetic or referential closure impossible. Creating the illusion of "presence" outside of language, realism in culture came to be regarded as the medium of ideology par excellence, the critical problem being that "presence" is no more than one of many textual effects. Showing that realist writing conventions, tying in with everyday commonsense, were not at all that commonsensical (if not often nonsensical): this became a primary concern of *Tel Quel*. It desired to show that, in one way or another, texts always imply a crisis in their attempts to refer to "reality"; a gap, a moment of undecidability in re-presenting or re-inscribing the singular text back into conventionalised modes of discourse. Not so much "literariness" *per se* but "*metaliterature*" thereby became an issue; not the

³⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, tr. Barbara Johnson, Chicago 1991, 174.

³⁹ Christopher Prendergast, *The Triangle of Representation*, New York 2000, 120.

way in which literature foregrounds the materiality of its components *in* literature, but the way it “systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice” *as* literature,⁴⁰ thereby creating a meaningful surplus that marks “the literary”, in literature but also in all other linguistic manifestations. For post-structuralists, the value of the avant-gardes lay precisely in their candid exposure of writing as writing (*écriture*) and of its own artifice as literature (“metaliterature”).⁴¹ Thus, as classical realism was seen by post-structuralists as the dominant “paradigm” of modern culture in general, the largely anti-realist “paradigm of modernism”,⁴² accordingly, became the counter-cultural norm. Once again, but now on a cultural scale, post-structuralists thereby universalised features of modernism, and, especially, the historical avant-gardes.

Although these insights appear commonplace today – and precisely their complacency is so troubling, I wish to show – they seemed fresh and groundbreaking in *Tel Quel*. In its 1965 special issue devoted to surrealist Antonin Artaud, the young Derrida published one of his first influential essays, “La parole soufflée”. Derrida however was not the only new voice to be heard in the avant-garde’s parlour. With *Théorie d’ensemble*, a volume composed in the Fall of 1968, *Tel Quel* also highlighted the key roles of Michel Foucault and Barthes, Lacan and Althusser, as well as a set of key words including “writing”, “text”, “the unconscious”, “history”, “work”, “trace”, “production”, “scene”, each referring to a particular site of enunciation.⁴³ As the programme of the “Tel Quelians” in the volume announced, their objective henceforth would be “to go back to a first ‘break’ in history, not stopping at the avant-garde of the 1920s (surrealism and Formalism relayed by structural linguistics), but rethinking the emblematic names of Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Marx and Freud”.⁴⁴

It is clear that these theorists differed in many respects from Formalism and its structuralist outgrowths. Less certain, however, is whether the literary “Tel Quelians” also moved *beyond* the historical avant-gardes. It would appear rather that theory came to overshadow its literary counter-

⁴⁰ Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*, Berkeley 1975, x.

⁴¹ For discussions of the notion “metafiction” that also illustrate how outside France the dialogue between post-structuralism and the continental avant-gardes evolved via a detour over postmodernism, see Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, London 1984, 102, and Marc Currie’s introduction to his anthology *Metafiction*, London 1995, 5–6.

⁴² As Astradur Eysteinsson defines modernism in its broadest sense, thus including the historical avant-gardes, in *The Concept of Modernism*, Ithaca 1990.

⁴³ Philippe Sollers (ed.), *Tel Quel: Théorie d’ensemble*, Paris 1975, 7.

⁴⁴ Rabaté, *The Future of Theory*, 84.

part. From *Tel Quel's* revised programme to scrutinise a number of "grand narratives" there resulted some memorable literary experiments that did not break away from modernism so much as refine some of its currents. Yet what today prevails from the post-structuralist heritage are not so much these literary texts themselves but the readings of literary texts – where these are readings, it should be added, not only of experimental modernists or contemporary literature, but also of canonised authors such as Dante Alighieri, John Donne and Victor Hugo. It is not Sollers' *Nombres* (1968), but Derrida's essay "Dissemination" on *Nombres* that is often reread today, identifying the novel with a purely textual universe.⁴⁵ Again, Sollers' great anti-realist programme or experiments testing the boundaries of redundancy in literature are little remembered today. What we remember above all is theory's anti-realism, its rage against the metaphysics of presence, expressed perhaps most convincingly in Barthes' *S/Z*, which was published in the periodical's now classical book series in 1970.

Works characterised by implications of "différance" by no means restrict themselves to modernism and the avant-gardes of course, but these very implications clearly owe much to the latter. Post-structuralist theory also therefore demonstrates that theory is always largely the effect of the object it scrutinises, but that over time this indebtedness is erased through a conceptual sedimentation of the notions which it puts to use, which in turn influence our understanding of "literature". We have come to accept that literature in general is both a "peculiar language", as Derek Attridge puts it recalling the Formalists,⁴⁶ and a heteroglossic language continuously articulating itself in relation to other, non-literary texts, which is a point post-structuralists would insist on.⁴⁷ It is an at once banal and baffling observation, therefore, that we owe these commonplaces largely to (a small number of) vanguard texts. As a corollary, features once intensely displayed by avant-garde writing have now been generalised and made to pertain to literature as such.

"Avant-garde: to each his/her reader", a critic once claimed.⁴⁸ The "writerly" texts so central in modernism and avant-garde studies played a

⁴⁵ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 173-286, 289-366. For the other readings mentioned here, see the issues of *Tel Quel* itself and to the studies of the journal mentioned earlier.

⁴⁶ Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language. Literature as Difference From the Renaissance to James Joyce*, London, 1988.

⁴⁷ The work of Bakhtin, as it was introduced by Julia Kristeva in *Tel Quel*, played a key-role here as well.

⁴⁸ Title of an essay by Silvia Contarini published in *Revue des études Italiennes*, 1-2, 1997, 95-107, my translation.

crucial role in the post-structuralist emancipation of the reader as well. Whether we turn to Barthes' classic essay "Death of the Author" (1966), Derrida's writings on Edmond Jabès or Artaud in *Writing and Difference* (1967), to Foucault's *Raymond Roussel* (1963),⁴⁹ or to Jean-François Lyotard's recurrent return to the avant-gardes, we find European avant-gardists constantly championed as writers who endow readers with freedom. With its highly diverse idiosyncratic texts the historical avant-garde produced a form of writing that showed how, against the prevalent cultural paradigm of realism in modernity, the radical Enlightenment project and perhaps even the humanist tradition could be continued in culture. It underlined that the subject, far from being "dead", was a symbolical cultural construction, a discursive reiteration, which could always be questioned and opposed in discourse or language. Modernist experimentation and the "jouissance" it displayed, in brief, also marked (wo)man's freedom.

Because of its proximity to avant-garde poetics many have maintained that with post-structuralist theory we now have both a practice and a theory of modernism ready to deal with its complex performative texts.⁵⁰ Post-structuralism's authority today tends to outweigh that of Formalist and structuralist critics; though some would argue that post-structuralism itself has little authority left now that its "Age" has come to a close and dust has come to settle upon it. Even so, as scholars we are all "fed" its insights, and those of preceding theoretical movements, in our formation as readers. As such, we can wonder: how would we be reading today if the avant-garde and modernism had not come about? This is not to say, of course, that a lot of other non-modernist forms of writing have not shaped literary theory. Nor do I imply that there are not many other ways of dealing with literature *as text*. But as my admittedly selective survey here illustrates, I hope, European vanguard writing's imprint on 20th-century theory is considerable. Hence, a further question imposes itself here, perhaps of greater importance: as many of our complacent views of literature in general today derive from readings of historical avant-garde texts, has

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass, Chicago 1980; Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, tr. Charles Ruas, New York 2007. On Foucault's complex ties to the avant-garde, see Simon During, *Foucault and Literature. Towards a Genealogy of Writing*, London 1992, chapter 3.

⁵⁰ See Ronald Schleifer's *Rhetoric and Death. The Language of Modernism and Postmodern Discourse Theory*, Urbana-Chicago 1990, Eysteinsson's remarks in *The Concept of Modernism* (135), and Helmut Lethen, "Modernism Cut in Half: The Exclusion of the Avant-Garde in the Debate on Postmodernism", in: Douwe W. Fokkema and Hans Bertens (eds.), *Approaching Postmodernism*, Amsterdam 1986, 233-8.

theory not also come to overshadow its source of inspiration, perhaps even making us blind for what makes (once made) this source so distinctive?

From "Literature" to the Avant-Garde

Now that the long twentieth century is finally behind us, perhaps we can begin to see this embryonic phase with new eyes. Far from being irrelevant or obsolete, the aesthetic of early modernism has provided the seeds of the materialist poetic which is increasingly our own – a poetic that seems much more attuned to the ready-mades, the "delays" in glass and verbal images of Marcel Duchamp, to the non-generic, non-representational texts of Gertrude Stein, and to the sound and visual poems, the poem-manifestos and artist's books of Velimir Khlebnikov than to the authenticity model – the "true voice of feeling" or "natural speech" paradigm – so dominant in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵¹

With these words Majorie Perloff, witty reader and staunch defender of vanguard literature, introduces her book *21st-Century Modernism* (2002). Perloff's claim in this book is that early 20th-century experimental poetics are still very much alive, if not finally reaching maturity, in the work of quite a few vanguard writers of more recent times. These writers, she argues, today figure in a veritable experimental tradition in literature, or rather, a *process* first launched by the historical avant-gardes and/or modernism as they set out to test the material bearing of language and literature.⁵² This does not "imply that modernism, [...] presented [as such a process, sb], is somehow normative, that it is superior to earlier – as to what will be later – poetic movements".⁵³ Yet that it is *a* norm within the contemporary institution of literature of course stands beyond doubt, because it is hard to rebut that whole contingents of writers since the Second World War (many of them also working within academia) have continued to refine the experimental method and textual tactics employed by early 20th-century peers. And this is, ultimately, why Perloff also coins the notion of a "21st-century modernism".

Perloff's argument recalls Picasso's words to Stein: don't worry if my painting doesn't resemble you *now*; this will come with time. Indeed, for Perloff there is undeniable continuity between early and late 20th-century experimental writing; both form part of the same process. By arguing as much, it is also clear that early 20th-century experimental writing tends to

⁵¹ Majorie Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism. The "New" Poetics*, Malden, Mass. 2002, 3-4.

⁵² On the avant-garde as process, see, among others, Majorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment. Avant-Garde, Arrière-Garde, and the Language of Rupture*, Chicago 1986.

⁵³ Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism*, 5.

lose distinctiveness. Yet what Perloff simultaneously does not question aloud here are the theoretical presumptions grounding her own readings, which obviously result from the shadow-process taking place in 20th-century theory as described above. When such presumptions are questioned, as for example in the following quote, the avant-garde, far from alive, as Perloff claims, shows itself as over and done with.

The avant-garde is over. There are few influential artists or professional art critics who would still deny this. This is not to demean the results, but we look at the work of Kandinsky or Willem de Kooning as we would at that of Rembrandt or Poussin; in principle, we read García Lorca or Joyce no differently than we would Dante or Cervantes; we listen with the same ear to Ligeti or Webern as we would to Josquin des Prez and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach; and we look at Gothic cathedrals with the same eyes as we use to look at Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture.⁵⁴

Quite, it is not unthinkable that we might be caught reading formally and thematically transgressive texts of the 1910s and 1920s alongside Renaissance plays, Romantic poetry or realist novels, depending on our tastes. Similarly, we might find ourselves looking at experimental paintings from the first decades of the 20th century, much in the same way as we study European masters from foregoing centuries. And that this is to a large extent due to the fact that we have interiorised the avant-garde's theoretical norms, seems anything but accidental here. Like the Tel Quelians, we have grown accustomed to reading Dante in the same way as we read an historical avant-garde text. We trace their suspicion, enjoy it, but often do so without questioning our theoretical presumptions.

The author of this second quote echoes Perloff's observation that "modernism" is not superior to, say, Romanticism, or any other (pre)modern aesthetic for that matter. Yet this observation also leads him to a rather different conclusion. In his book from which I draw this quote, he goes on to argue that precisely the normative if not authoritative status of the avant-garde in contemporary theory and criticism has brought an end to the *project* that began with the early 20th-century avant-gardes. For, indeed, "avant-garde" (or modernism) comes with a different tenor here. "Avant-garde" is understood here not so much as a formally experimental process taking place within the institution of art and bent on liberating the materiality of art and writing. Rather, *on top of that*, it is seen as a cultural *project*, as it was theorised perhaps most clearly in Peter Bürger's *Theorie der*

⁵⁴ Maarten Doorman, *Art in Progress. A Philosophical Response to the End of the Avant-Garde*, Amsterdam 2003, 116.

Avantgarde (1974), according to which the avant-garde sought to unite art and life, to this aim desiring to transgress the confines of “art” as an institution.⁵⁵ In this respect, indeed, it would seem that we have come to terms with the avant-garde. Its work has come to form part of academic curricula, its paintings often hang in the same musea as those made by artists the avant-garde firmly opposed. As such, the avant-garde (and modernism) would seem to have little secrets left. Its *process* today being a norm within the institution, we are also witnessing the end of the early 20th-century “heroic” avant-garde *project*.

Naturally, a lot of caveats could be added here to the claim that the broader cultural and social underpinnings of the avant-garde (its project) have come to a close. Yet the author of the second quote is certainly not alone in advancing such a claim. Niklas Luhmann, for instance, using an image that recalls Walter Benjamin's Angelus Novus, has observed that contemporary artists and writers find it increasingly difficult to continue the project of their early 20th-century peers. The causes of these difficulties are complex and varied, but since the 1990s, according to Luhmann, aspiring vanguard writers and artists are perhaps best described as “oarsmen on a rowing boat who never get to see where they are heading, merely where they came from”.⁵⁶ Like Perloff, Luhmann would be the last to contradict that as a formally experimental force or process the avant-garde is still very dominant within the institution, or system, as he calls it, of contemporary art and literature. But to those critically contemplating the continuation of its project, only questions, and nostalgia perhaps, are left. T.J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea*⁵⁷ needs but be mentioned here.

The project and process of the early 20th-century avant-garde are thus closely interrelated when we think about *the* or *an* avant-garde today. It is because we witness the ubiquity of outgrowths of its process in art and literature (and beyond), that its project too might have come to an end. If there is any truth to this logic,⁵⁸ and assuming there is a consensus among some of us at least about the value of seeing its full project through, of studying its complete scope and range, then perhaps our critical and

⁵⁵ On the project thus inscribed into the historical avant-gardes, see Wolfgang Asholt and Walter Fähnders, “Projekt Avantgarde”, in: *Die ganze Welt ist eine Manifestation*, Darmstadt 1997, 1-17.

⁵⁶ Niklas Luhmann, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, 12, my translation.

⁵⁷ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven 1999.

⁵⁸ Almost two decades ago, Paul Mann cunningly remarked that the alleged “death” of the avant-garde only comes about in theory and discourses trying to capture the essence of the avant-garde. See Paul Mann, *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde*, Bloomington-Indianapolis, 1991.

theoretical energy should go to revising the *process* launched by those early 20th-century avant-garde. After all, unlike theorists, the avant-garde rarely defined what literature (or art) *is*, always stressing what it *could be* and *ought to be*. Perhaps, therefore, now is the moment to start looking afresh at what made these early 20th-century writings so different.

Ironically, this might entail that we first estrange ourselves from the very same avant-gardes which, a century ago, taught us what aesthetic estrangement actually means. This could be done by drawing to the fore much older theoretical traditions, such as that of rhetoric, which was allegedly debunked by the avant-gardes but obviously continued to shape its writings (yet perhaps differently than before?). Revising the “modernist” or “avant-garde” canon appears a viable option as well. Leaving aside the vexed issue of the *arrière-garde* addressed in other articles of this book, an expansion to so-called “marginal” or “peripheral” regions in Central and Eastern Europe might turn out to be very fruitful. For, clearly, the story of the European avant-garde’s dialogue with 20th-century theory, as I have very partially told it here, is very much an affair of culturally dominant centres in the West and the East. Yet above all, if we are to revise our theoretical understanding of modernism/the avant-garde, it seems only logical that we first chart a more comprehensive picture of the European avant-garde’s enduring influence on 20th-century theory⁵⁹ – who knows: the ways in which we theoretically approach “(European) literature” and “European avant-garde” might turn out to be not all that different; alternatively, experimental European modernists and avant-gardists might still have a few secrets in store for literary theory, that other, peculiar branch of modernism and avant-garde studies.

⁵⁹ *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*, edited by Stephen Ross (London 2008), is a good start, but clearly a lot more work needs to be done.

Images and Ideas

Phönix Europa? Krieg und Kultur in Rudolf Pannwitz' und Hugo von Hofmannsthals europäischer Idee

Cristina Fossaluzza (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)

Eine intellektuelle Begegnung im Zeichen Europas

In der Einleitung zu einer erstpublizierten Auswahl aus seinem damals noch unveröffentlichten Briefwechsel mit Hugo von Hofmannsthal denkt der deutsche Kulturphilosoph Rudolf Pannwitz 1954 an die fulminante Begegnung mit dem österreichischen Dichter zurück, die etwa vierzig Jahre früher stattfand. Dabei betont Pannwitz nicht zuletzt die entscheidende Bedeutung des Themas ‚Europa‘ für diese intellektuelle Freundschaft und erwähnt insbesondere das ihm und Hofmannsthal gemeinsame und durchaus brennende Interesse für eine tausendjährige europäische Kultur, die in den Jahren des Ersten Weltkriegs an einem Wendepunkt angelangt zu sein scheint:

[I]ch durfte unmittelbar vor seinem Untergange, ja während seines Zusammenbrechens unser hundert- und tausendjähriges Kulturalter in einer seiner bezaubernden Nachblüten noch erleben. Es war kein Zufall, dass meine Verbindung mit Hofmannsthal durch meine „Krisis der europäischen Kultur“ vermittelt wurde. Und hier zeigte sich Hofmannsthal, in den Briefen wie in den Gesprächen, in einem solchen Umfange, einer solchen Tiefe, einer so überpersönlichen Sachlichkeit und aufopfernden Wirksamkeit, aufs Letzte zielend und ihm hingegeben, ganz ohne Maske und kaum noch verhüllt, dass es unerlässlich ist, seinen Selbstzeugnissen dieses hinzuzufügen.¹

¹ Hugo von Hofmannsthal & Rudolf Pannwitz, *Briefwechsel 1907-1926*, Gerhard Schuster (Hrsg.), Frankfurt am Main 1994, 629 (= HH1/RP). Für die häufiger angeführten Werke werden folgende Abkürzungen verwendet: DuE = Rudolf Pannwitz, *Deutschland und Europa. Grundriss einer deutsch-europäischen Politik*, München 1918; HKA = Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, Paul Kluckhohn & Richard Samuel (Hrsg.), Stuttgart 1960ff.; KeK = Rudolf Pannwitz, *Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur*, in: *Werke*, Bd. 2, Buch 1, München 1917; RA = Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Reden und Aufsätze II (1914-1924)*, in: *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*.

Wahrhaftig ist es alles andere als ein Zufall, wenn die Schrift *Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur* Pannwitz die Gelegenheit bietet, 1917 ein intensives und tief gehendes Gespräch über Grundlagen und Perspektiven der europäischen Kultur mit Hofmannsthal, dem von ihm schon lange geschätzten Dichter, zu beginnen. In diesem Buch setzt sich Pannwitz mitten im Ersten Weltkrieg mit ‚Europa‘ auseinander, einem Themenkomplex, der ihm eben in dieser Zeit besonders dringend erscheint und der ihn dann noch lange, bis in die fünfziger Jahre hinein, in verschiedenen Werken beschäftigen wird – man denke nur an seine Schriften *Deutschland und Europa. Grundriss einer deutsch-europäischen Politik* (1918), *Europäisches Zeitgedicht* (1919), *Die deutsche Idee Europa* (1931) und *Beiträge zu einer europäischen Kultur* (1954). Wenn Pannwitz in diesem Sinne als einer derjenigen Kulturphilosophen der Moderne gilt, die sich am intensivsten und am kontinuierlichsten mit ‚Europa‘ befasst haben, so wundert es nicht, dass gerade sein in der *Krisis* geäußertes Interesse an einem weitreichenden und brisanten Thema wie die ‚europäische Kultur‘ auch den Anlass für seine Begegnung mit einem Intellektuellen von Hofmannsthals Kaliber darstellt, dessen ästhetische und theoretische Überlegungen sich in der instabilen Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges auch immer wieder um Aktualität und Möglichkeiten seiner eigenen Kultur drehen.

Als der österreichische Dichter im Juli 1917 das Buch des deutschen Kulturphilosophen zugeschickt bekommt, glaubt er tatsächlich, ein regelrecht epochales Werk in den Händen zu halten. Das bewegt ihn, unverzüglich mit dem ihm so gut wie unbekannten Autor Kontakt aufzunehmen und ihm am 4. August 1917 in einem schon vertraulich klingenden Ton Folgendes zu schreiben:

Ihr Buch hat mich in diesen Tagen, ich kann schon sagen, unausgesetzt beschäftigt, ja es hat, durch seine Kraft und den ungeheueren Gehalt, den es mir zuführt, zusammen mit dem Südwind, meine sonstige Existenz eigentlich annulliert. Der Bezüge sind so zahllose, so merkwürdig tief in mich hineingreifende, es ist mir zuweilen, als käme durch das Buch alles was ich in den letzten fünfzehn Jahren gedacht, geplant, oft wie bewusstlos angerührt und ein Stück weit gewälzt, dann wieder liegen gelassen, mir nun aufs neue entgegen, ein Strom der mich mitreißt u. betäubt. (HH/RP, 18)

Bernd Schoeller in Beratung mit Rudolf Hirsch (Hrsg.), Frankfurt am Main 1979; KFSa = Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Ernst Behler (Hrsg.), Paderborn u.a. 1960ff.

Der Grund, warum Pannwitz' Buch Hofmannsthal so nahe kommt und ihn geradezu „unwiderstehlich an[zieht]“ (HH/RP, 18), scheint insbesondere darin zu liegen, dass der Dichter hier viele kulturelle Fragen wiederfindet, mit denen er sich seit dem Ausbruch des Krieges selbst intensiv befasst und denen er vor allem in seinen publizistischen Aufsätzen Ausdruck verliehen hatte. Das Bedürfnis der beiden Autoren, sich über diese Probleme auszutauschen, äußert sich in einer beeindruckenden dreijährigen Korrespondenz, die vom Sommer 1917 bis zum Ende des Jahres 1920 reicht – einer Korrespondenz, in der sie Grundlagen und Ziele ihrer Kultur sowie ihres eigenen künstlerischen Schaffens erkunden und diskutieren und in der sie nicht zuletzt ihre gemeinsame Europa-Idee immer wieder thematisieren.

Mit Blick auf Gemeinsamkeiten und Wechselwirkungen wird im Folgenden versucht, diesem Europa-Konzept in Pannwitz' und Hofmannsthals bezeichnendsten Schriften der Kriegszeit nachzugehen und es in seinem kulturgeschichtlichen Kontext zu verorten.

Krisis und Wiedergeburt der „Kultur“: Pannwitz' *Imperium Europaeum*

Die Krisis der europaeischen Kultur war als der erste Band einer geplanten Trilogie über das weitreichende Thema der „Freiheit des Menschen“ gedacht². Dieser erste Teil setzt sich insbesondere das Ziel, wie es im Vorwort heißt, „bei den wichtigsten dingen des lebens an die stelle philosophischer phrasen historische realitäten zu setzen“ (KeK, III). Pannwitz' Europa-Buch wirft somit einen bewusst *historischen* Blick auf die europäische Kultur und auf deren Akteure, indem es von den ersten Zeilen an eine Parallele zwischen der Gegenwart und der Vergangenheit zieht, oder präziser: zwischen der historischen Lage Europas in den Jahren 1915 und 1815. In seinem Buch gibt Pannwitz der Überzeugung Ausdruck, dass in diesem Zeitraum – zwischen der Zeit der Niederlage Napoleons und des Ersten Weltkriegs – eine Analogie bestehe, die auf ein in diesen Epochen herrschendes, historisches „Bedürfnis“ zurückzuführen sei. Für den Autor der *Krisis* ist jene geschichtliche Lage, die am Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts Napoleon „gefordert“ habe, am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts „nicht anders nur dringlicher geworden“ (KeK, 9) – die historische „Aufgabe“, die sich dem französischen Kaiser gestellt habe und

² Von den beiden Bänden, die hätten folgen sollen (*Das Jahrhundert des deutschen Geistes* und *Kosmos Atheos*), erblickt aber nur *Kosmos Atheos* im Jahr 1926 tatsächlich das Licht der Welt.

nach dem Wiener Kongress ungelöst geblieben sei, verlange im zweiten Jahr des Ersten Weltkriegs immer noch dringend nach Erfüllung, ja sie lasse sich in dieser Zeit nicht mehr aufschieben.

Zu fragen ist vorab, woraus diese ungelöste historische Aufgabe für Pannwitz konkret besteht. Das Ziel von Napoleons Mission sei nichts weniger als ein neues ‚Europa‘ gewesen, ein Europa, das der französische Kaiser nach dem Ende des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation hätte gründen wollen und das nach seiner Niederlage unvollendet geblieben sei. In den nachfolgenden Jahrzehnten habe Napoleons Europa-Vorstellung zwar ideel weitergelebt, jedoch sei seine Verwirklichung an drei historischen Hauptrichtungen des 19. Jahrhunderts erneut gescheitert, die gleich auf der ersten Seite seines Buches genannt werden: „der bürgerliche fortschritt“, „der aufschwung preussens“ und „das bismarcksche deutsche reich“ (KeK, 1). Pannwitz verweist hier offensichtlich auf die schnelle Verbreitung der Technik in der modernen Gesellschaft, auf das nationale Streben, das 1871 zur Schaffung eines deutschen Nationalstaates führte, und auf die starke Bürokratisierung, die Bismarcks Reich charakterisiert hatte. Wenn die von Pannwitz erwähnten Richtungen sich generell mit den Stichwörtern ‚Technisierung‘, ‚Nationalismus‘ und ‚Bürokratismus‘ zusammenfassen lassen, ist aber noch zu klären, wie das ungeborene napoleonische Europa, von dem in Pannwitz’ Buch die Rede ist, hätte aussehen sollen und warum dieses Europa gerade durch den ‚bürgerlichen‘, ‚politischen‘ und ‚ökonomischen‘ Geist des 19. Jahrhunderts zertrümmert worden sei. Um eine solche, auf Napoleon zurückgehende europäische Idee darzulegen, konzentriert sich Pannwitz hier nicht so sehr auf deren ursprünglich französische Prägung, sondern eher auf die politische Form des *Imperiums*, die der Kulturphilosoph 1917 immer noch für unentbehrlich für ein modernes Europa hält und in seinem Buch energisch reklamiert, indem er nahezu entrüstet niederschreibt: „wie wäre auch ein europa ohne ein imperium möglich!“ (KeK, 4). Die auf der ‚Freiheit des Menschen‘ gegründete europäische Gesellschaft, die der Autor der *Krisis* 1915 erträumt, gründet also nicht auf einem demokratischen Freiheitsbegriff. Im Gegenteil ist eine solche Gesellschaft „nur von einem aus dem chaos entstiegene[n] imperator zu verwirklichen“ (KeK, 6), einem neuen genialen freien Geist, der nach den historischen Beispielen Cäsars, Karl des V. und Napoleons³ in der Lage sei, ein modernes „Imperium Europaeum“ (DuE, 21) herbeizuführen.

³ Allgemein zum Napoleon-Bild in der deutschen Kultur vgl. Barbara Besslich, *Der deutsche Napoleon-Mythos. Literatur und Erinnerung 1800 bis 1945*, Darmstadt 2007.

Dieses „Imperium“ wird für Pannwitz nun im Kriegsjahr 1915 im Unterschied zur Vergangenheit unter der Leitung Deutschlands realisiert werden müssen. Es mag wenig verwunderlich scheinen, dass der deutsche Schriftsteller in Zeiten des Krieges seiner Überzeugung Ausdruck gibt, dass Deutschland im Laufe des 19. Jahrhunderts an Frankreichs Stelle gerückt und „die vormacht in europa“ (KeK, 5) geworden sei. Anders als man denken könnte, möchte Pannwitz hier aber nicht primär ein Loblied auf sein Land anstimmen, nationalistische Politik in Deutschlands Interesse machen oder Propaganda in Zeiten des Krieges verbreiten. Als Kulturphilosoph möchte er vielmehr eine konstitutive Aporie von Deutschlands politischer „Vormacht“ hervorheben, die darin besteht, dass Deutschland wirtschaftlich und militärisch an die Spitze Europas gekommen sei, bevor es geistig und kulturell ausreifen konnte⁴. Genau diese kulturelle Unreife stellt für Pannwitz nun den Grund dar, warum Deutschland letztlich noch *antieuropäisch* sei: Nach der französischen Revolution habe sich dieses Land zu allem Unglück nicht nach dem übernationalen Vorbild des napoleonischen *Kulturimperiums* entwickelt, sondern die siegende ‚englische Richtung‘ verfolgt, die zu einer nationalen Einheit unter der Leitung Preußens und unter dem Vorzeichen des Imperialismus, des Militarismus und des Bürokratismus geführt habe. Demzufolge stellt die nationale Einigung von 1871 für Pannwitz gerade das Gegenteil von Napoleons Europa-Idee dar: Während das deutsche Kaiserreich dem Beispiel Englands folgend „zu kapitalistisch sozialistischen welthandels suprematieen“ (KeK, 193) hinstrebe, habe Frankreich am Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts „ein geistiges und kultur imperium von europa“ verwirklichen wollen (KeK, 193) – ein Kulturimperium, das Pannwitz' Europa-Ideal entspricht und das nun – in Zeiten des Umbruchs und des Krieges – zurückgewonnen werden könne, ja zurückzugewinnen sei.

Pannwitz' Europa-Idee gründet also auf dem Konzept eines Kulturimperiums und richtet sich explizit gegen den zu seiner Zeit herrschenden Nationalismus bzw. Imperialismus. Am Beispiel von historischen Imperien wie dem Römischen Reich, dem Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation und dem Napoleonischen Reich müsste nach Pannwitz auch das Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts wieder zu einem übernationalen Kultur-Organismus werden – zu einer geistigen und kulturellen Einheit jenseits der politischen Nationalstaaten und jenseits der im 19. Jahrhundert vorherrschenden kapitalistischen Ordnung, die nur „interessen-

⁴ Vgl. KeK, 31f. Zu ähnlichen Positionen anderer Intellektueller in dieser Zeit vgl. etwa: Uwe Schneider & Andreas Schumann (Hrsg.), *Krieg der Geister. Erster Weltkrieg und literarische Moderne*, Würzburg 2000.

gemeinschaften“ und „geldzentralen“ (KeK, 202) kenne. Nicht zu unterschätzen ist, dass der Autor der *Krisis* gerade im „europäische[n] Krieg“ (KeK, 8) – so Pannwitz’ Bezeichnung für den Ersten Weltkrieg – die Chance zum erhofften „renascimentum europaeum“ (KeK, 31) erblickt, den Wendepunkt hin zu einer Wiedergeburt jenes von ihm erträumten Europa der Kultur, das nach dem Krieg aus der Asche des 19. Jahrhunderts wie ein Phönix verjüngt auferstehen könne. Unübersehbar ist, dass der von Pannwitz hergestellte Zusammenhang zwischen europäischem Krieg und Wiedergeburt der europäischen Kultur auf eine philosophische Geschichtsauffassung zurückgeht, die den Schriftsteller dazu führt, nicht nur seine Gegenwart, sondern auch die Geschichte der europäischen Kultur allgemein als einen organischen Prozess zu interpretieren, in dem sich Krisen und Wiedergeburten ständig abwechseln und in dem jeder (letztlich notwendigen) Krise einer Neublüte folgt, ja folgen muss⁵.

Vor dem Hintergrund seiner Interpretation der Kulturgeschichte Europas als eines organischen Prozesses erkennt Pannwitz im Anhang seiner *Krisis* einen möglichen Ausweg aus der Stagnation der europäischen Kultur seiner Zeit in der Verschmelzung mit den noch lebendigen morgenländischen Kulturen, einer Verschmelzung, die zur Wiederkehr eines großen europäischen „Mittags“ im Sinne Nietzsches führen könne⁶. Außer der Verschmelzung mit dem Orient gibt es aber in Pannwitz’ Augen auch eine viel näher liegende Rettung für Europa und Deutschland, eine Rettungsmöglichkeit, der er 1918 in seiner Schrift *Deutschland und Europa* Ausdruck gibt. In diesem Werk, das ein Jahr nach der *Krisis* erscheint, soll (wie es im Untertitel heißt) ein „Grundriss einer deutsch-europaeischen Politik“ gezogen werden. Hier äußert der Autor die Überzeugung, dass das zukünftige Europa „auf der organischen Verbindung zwischen Deutschland und Oesterreich“ beruhen werde (DuE, 35), denn in seinen Augen bilden diese beiden Länder nichts Geringeres als den „Kern von Europa“ (DuE, 49). Der Grund für Pannwitz’ Überzeugung liegt darin, dass er im Österreich von 1918 den

⁵ Diese organische Geschichtsauffassung ist in dieser Zeit sehr verbreitet. Man denke nur an Oswald Spenglers kulturphilosophisches Werk *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, dessen erster Band einige Jahre nach Pannwitz’ *Krisis* erscheinen wird (1918). Zu Spenglers organisch-morphologischer Geschichtsphilosophie vgl. auch: Wolfgang Krebs, *Die Imperiale Endzeit. Oswald Spengler und die Zukunft der abendländischen Zivilisation*, Rhombos 2008.

⁶ Vgl. KeK, 261. Vgl. dazu auch: Thomas Pekar, *Asiatisch-de(kon)struktive Europaanstöße: Hofmannsthal und Pannwitz. Zur Konstellation von Europa und Asien im europäischen ‚Krisen-Diskurs‘ am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, gehalten: Europa! Europa? Gründungskonferenz des Europäischen Netzwerks für Studien zu Avantgarde und Moderne (EAM), Universität Gent, Belgien, 29.-31. Mai 2008.

Überrest des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation erkennt, einen Überrest, der das verlorene Ideal eines übernationalen Kulturimperiums noch in sich trage und von dem Deutschland ausgehen müsse, um seiner europäischen Aufgabe gerecht zu werden:

Ist nun vielleicht Reichsdeutschland der neue Anfang jenes alten Gesamtreiches, so muss es, um seine Aufgabe ja nicht zu verfehlen, ehe es zu spät geworden, begreifen lernen: dass [...] es selbst wieder, wenn auch nicht im äusseren politischen so doch in jedem inneren kulturellen Sinne, in die Idee Oesterreich eingehen muss (es selbst hat keine Idee und kann keine haben isoliert von Oesterreich [...]). (DuE, 52)

Die *Idee* Österreich ist – so Pannwitz' These – für ein „Imperium Europaeum“ unter dem Vorzeichen der deutschen Kultur unentbehrlich. Als Zeugnis des Heiligen Römischen Reiches bilde diese Idee den Ausgangspunkt für ein vom deutschen Geist beseeltes Europa, welches das Jahrhundert des Nationalismus und des Militarismus endlich hinter sich bringen könne.

Dieser Enthusiasmus für Österreich, den Pannwitz insbesondere in der Schrift *Deutschland und Europa* ausdrückt, wird nach der Begegnung mit Hofmannsthal von dessen Publizistik der Kriegsjahre stark beeinflusst⁷. Doch entwickeln sich Pannwitz' und Hofmannsthals europäische Ideen im Allgemeinen unabhängig voneinander. Bis auf den spezifischen Österreich-Bezug hat Pannwitz' Idee eines europäischen Kulturimperiums auch vor der intellektuellen Begegnung der beiden Schriftstellern viel mit jenem europäischen Konzept gemeinsam, das Hofmannsthal in den Aufsätzen der Kriegsjahre thematisiert. Nicht zuletzt wegen dieser Verwandtschaft erkennt der österreichische Dichter 1917 im Autor der *Krisis* eine Art intellektuellen Zwilling, einen Bruder, der sich nach dem Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges nicht zufällig für Österreich als Wahlheimat entschieden hat. Wie Hofmannsthal glaubt, liegt der Grund für diese Entscheidung für Österreich gerade darin, dass Pannwitz – wenn auch aus Preußen kommend – ein seltenes Gespür für die auch ihm selbst so teure europäische Aufgabe Österreichs besitzt⁸.

⁷ Wie wörtliche Zitate beweisen, vgl. dazu: Gregor Streim, „Deutscher Geist und europäische Kultur. Die ‚europäische Idee‘ in der Kriegspublizistik von Rudolf Borchardt, Hugo von Hofmannsthal und Rudolf Pannwitz“, in: *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift*, 46, 1996, 174-97, hier 190.

⁸ Vgl. dazu Pannwitz' Äußerungen in seinem Brief an Hofmannsthal vom 1. August 1917, in: HH/RP, 16.

Von Österreich nach Europa: Hofmannsthals Idee einer europäischen Kultur und deren Semantik

In den Kriegsjahren ist Hofmannsthal, der sich bisher nicht sehr intensiv mit Politik beschäftigt hat, sehr engagiert⁹: Er unternimmt amtliche und halbamtliche Reisen, unterhält Verbindungen zu politisch aktiven Zeitgenossen und äußert sich publizistisch über den Krieg in Reden und Aufsätzen. Fragt man sich, was es mit diesem Engagement auf sich hat, so ist nicht nur darauf hinzuweisen, dass Hofmannsthal im ersten Kriegsjahr dem Pressebüro des Kriegsfürsorgeamtes zugewiesen wird und dort bis Mai 1917 tätig ist, sondern auch darauf, dass der Dichter den Weltkrieg als eine ‚Mission‘ versteht, und zwar weniger eine im strengen Sinne politische als vielmehr eine *geistige* Mission – als die Chance zu einer Auferstehung der Kultur, die sich insbesondere in der österreichischen und europäischen Idee konkretisiert. Zu betonen ist aber, dass die geistige, ‚europäische‘ Integration, die der Krieg in Hofmannsthals Augen herbeiführen soll, nicht viel mit dem Universalismus der Aufklärung zu tun hat, sondern (was die Forschung meistens übersehen hat)¹⁰ auf die organische Europa-Idee der Romantik zurückgeht, eine genuin *geschichtsphilosophische* Idee, die nicht nur in Novalis’ Schrift *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799), sondern auch in Friedrich Schlegels Spätwerk immer wieder thematisiert wird¹¹. Die Kontinuität zwischen Hofmannsthals Europa-Konzept und der romantischen Europa-Idee wird klar, wenn man sich z.B. folgenden Passus aus Novalis’ Europa-Essay vergegenwärtigt, in dem der Autor den „Stoff der Geschichte“ beschreibt:

Ueberdem haben wir ja mit Zeiten und Perioden zu thun, und ist diesen eine Oszillation, ein Wechsel entgegengesetzter Bewegungen nicht wesentlich? und ist diesen eine beschränkte Dauer nicht eigenthümlich, ein Wachsthum und ein Abnehmen nicht ihre Natur? aber auch eine Auferstehung, eine Verjüngung, in

⁹ Vgl. dazu Heinz Lunzer, *Hofmannsthals politische Tätigkeit in den Jahren 1914 bis 1917*, Frankfurt am Main u.a. 1981; und Andreas Schumann, „Macht mir aber viel Freude“. Hugo von Hofmannsthals Publizistik während des Ersten Weltkriegs“, in: Schneider & Schumann (Hrsg.), *Krieg der Geister*, 137-51.

¹⁰ Wie Streim dargelegt hat, vgl. „Deutscher Geist und europäische Kultur“, 183ff.

¹¹ Man denke an Schlegels Zeitschrift *Europa* (1803-1805) aber auch an dessen Wiener Vorlesungen *Über die neuere Geschichte* (1810-1811) und über die *Philosophie der Geschichte* (1828). Zu Schlegels Europa-Idee vgl. u.a. Matthias Schöning, „Im Zeichen Europas. Friedrich Schlegels topographische Neuordnung seines Denkens“, in: *Athenäum. Jahrbuch der Friedrich Schlegel-Gesellschaft*, 18, 2008, 123-38 und Herbert Uerlings, „Das Europa der Romantik. Novalis, Friedrich und August Wilhelm Schlegel, Manzoni“, in: Silvio Vietta, Dirk Kemper & Eugenio Spedicato (Hrsg.), *Das Europa-Projekt der Romantik und die Moderne. Ansätze zu einer deutsch-italienischen Mentalitätsgeschichte*, Tübingen 2005, 39-72.

neuer, tüchtiger Gestalt, nicht auch von ihnen mit Gewißheit zu erwarten? fortschreitende, immer mehr sich vergrößernde Evolutionen sind der Stoff der Geschichte. – Was jetzt nicht die Vollendung erreicht, wird sie bei einem künftigen Versuch erreichen, oder bei einem abermaligen; vergänglich ist nichts was die Geschichte ergriff, aus unzähligen Verwandlungen geht es in immer reicheren Gestalten erneuert wieder hervor. (HKA 3, 510)

Nicht nur an dieser Stelle seiner Europa-Schrift greift Novalis auf eine Lebensmetaphorik zurück, indem er etwa auf eine „Verjüngung“ sowie auf „Verwandlungen“ und „Evolutionen“ der Geschichte hinweist, sondern er schöpft immer wieder aus dieser Metaphorik, indem er die „Wiedergeburt“ (HKA 3, 511) bzw. das „Wachsthum“ (HKA 3, 513) der europäischen Kultur, das „Zeugungselement der Religion“ (HKA 3, 517) oder das „heilig[e] Organ“ (HKA 3, 523) der Nationen anführt. Nicht anders Friedrich Schlegel, der Europa in seiner gleichnamigen Zeitschrift in der Nachfolge Novalis' als eine im Werden begriffene Lebens- und Kultureinheit schildert¹². Später wird Europa in Schlegels Wiener Vorlesungen über die *Philosophie des Lebens* (1827) nicht zufällig als eine „Macht im Leben geltend“ (KFSa X, 280) definiert, eine lebendige Macht, die – wie sowohl in den Vorlesungen *Über die neuere Geschichte* als auch in denen über die *Philosophie der Geschichte* ausführlich dargelegt wird – während der tausendjährigen Geschichte des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation gewirkt und eine lange Reihe von Krisen und Wiedergeburten erlebt habe.

Ähnlich wie Novalis und Schlegel versteht Hofmannsthal unter „Europa“ eine organische Einheit, die im Laufe einer tausendjährigen Geschichte durch einige „glücklich überstandenen Kriegsgewitter“¹³ hindurch sich immer wieder habe erneuern können, weil sie durch einen schöpferischen Geist der deutschen Kultur zusammengehalten worden sei. Genau in diesem Sinne schreibt Hofmannsthal 1915 in seinem Aufsatz *Krieg und Kultur*, dass die Grausamkeit der Kriegereignisse nur im Hinblick auf eine durch und durch „geistige“ Mission erträglich sei, die dem Ersten Weltkrieg innewohne – was in einem größeren Zusammenhang auch aus dem Verlauf der europäischen (und insbesondere österreichischen) Geschichte der vorhergehenden tausend Jahre herauszulesen sei:

¹² Vgl. dazu: Ernst Behler, *Die Zeitschriften der Brüder Schlegel. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Romantik*, Darmstadt 1983, 59-99, hier 67ff.

¹³ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, „Aufbauen, nicht einreißen“ (1915), in: RA II, 385.

Die Mission Österreichs, an die ich glaube und für die ein ungeheures Blutopfer in diesen Monaten von unseren Völkern vereint mit dem ungarischen Volk gebracht wird, ist eine europäische: wie könnten wir es ertragen, jenes Europa, von dem wir unsere tausendjährige Mission empfangen haben [...] als ein im geistigen und sittlichen Sinne nicht mehr existierendes zu denken? Österreich bedarf mehr als alle andern eines Europa – es ist ja doch selber ein Europa im Kleinen. Für uns – noch mehr als für die andern – hat dieser Krieg auch eine geistige Bedeutung, die mit nicht minderer Kraft uns anfaßt, als die von allen erkannte furchtbare materielle Wucht des Geschehens. (RA II, 417)

Auf das Kriegsgewitter werde eine neue Orientierung der Geister folgen: Davon ist Hofmannsthal überzeugt, und für ihn bedeutet das gigantische Kriegsereignis offensichtlich schon früh den Abschluss einer ganzen Kulturepoche. Der Krieg erhält somit nicht zuletzt eine *geistige* Bedeutung – er ist als Wendepunkt, als Auslöser für eine erwünschte kulturelle Umwälzung und als Voraussetzung für ein neues Europa zu verstehen¹⁴. Fragt man sich, warum diese Umwälzung aber so notwendig ist und welches Ziel mit jener ‚europäischen‘ Mission verbunden ist, an die Hofmannsthal glaubt, so ist vorab zu bemerken, dass Hofmannsthal den Krieg als das Ende einer fatalen historischen Entwicklung betrachtet, deren Anfänge mit der französischen Revolution und mit dem Höhepunkt deutschen Geisteslebens um 1800 verknüpft sind, und die schließlich zum Bürokratismus und Materialismus des 19. Jahrhunderts geführt habe. Das zivilisierte und als „flügelahm“ (RA II, 419) empfundene Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts soll im Ersten Weltkrieg zugunsten einer neuen organischen und geistigen Einheit zugrunde gehen. Sehr prägnant bringt Hofmannsthal diesen Erneuerungsprozess in seinem Aufsatz zum Ausdruck: „ein neues mit ungeahnter Flügelfkraft begnadetes Europa [soll] sich aus dem selbstgewollten Brande seines Nestes emporhebe[n]“ (RA II, 419).

Hervorzuheben ist, dass Hofmannsthal in seinem Aufsatz für ein Europa plädiert, in dem *geistige* anstatt *amtliche* Formen der Autorität zu Tage treten sollen, und sich für ein Wiedererwachen des *religiösen* Geistes sowie für einen „hohen“ Begriff des Volkes gegen den „gefährlichen“ Begriff der Masse ausspricht¹⁵. Somit beschreibt er das neue Europa mithilfe von organischen und zugleich geistigen Kategorien: knapp und bündig sei Europa ein „wahrer Organismus, durchströmt von der inneren

¹⁴ Hofmannsthals Auffassung des Krieges ist symptomatisch für eine weit verbreitete Tendenz unter europäischen Intellektuellen in dieser Zeit, die den Krieg als ein ‚geistiges‘ Ereignis interpretieren. Vgl. dazu: Schneider & Schumann (Hrsg.), *Krieg der Geister*. Doch wird diese ‚geistige Mission‘ nicht bei allen Intellektuellen so eng mit einer Kulturidee im Zeichen Europas in Verbindung gebracht wie bei Hofmannsthal.

¹⁵ Vgl. RA II, 419.

Religion zu sich selbst“¹⁶. Nicht zu übersehen ist, dass diese Kategorien auf eine Gegenüberstellung von ‚Leben‘ und ‚Ratio‘, ‚Poesie‘ und ‚Ökonomie‘, ‚Kultur‘ und ‚Politik‘ zurückgehen, die schon die Frühromantik statuiert hatte¹⁷ und im frühen 20. Jahrhundert weit verbreitet war, wenngleich in einer anderen Form¹⁸. Genau in diesem Sinne hatte Novalis in seiner Europa-Schrift gerade in der deutschen Kultur die Spuren eines neuen Europa wahrnehmen wollen:

Deutschland geht einen langsamen aber sichern Gang vor den übrigen europäischen Ländern voraus. Während diese durch den Krieg, Spekulation, und Parthey-Geist beschäftigt sind, bildet sich der Deutsche mit allem Fleiß zum Genossen einer höhern Epoche der Cultur, und dieser Vorschritt muß ihm ein großes Uebergewicht über die Andere[n] im Lauf der Zeit geben. (HKA 3, 519)

Behält man im Blick, dass „Deutschland“ hier nicht politisch, sondern geistig – nicht als Staat, sondern als Kultur – verstanden werden soll, so ist es unübersichtlich, dass Hofmannsthals Europa-Idee ihre Prinzipien gerade aus der romantischen kulturellen Semantik schöpft, einer Semantik, auf die Novalis schon im zitierten Passus eindeutig rekurriert. Mithilfe der antithetischen interpretatorischen Kategorien der Romantik möchte diese Europa-Idee die Kultur ganz für sich in Anspruch nehmen und sich somit einem neuen „Partei-Geist“ bewusst entgegenstellen, einem Geist der Modernisierung, Rationalisierung und Technisierung, der das 19. Jahrhundert charakterisiert habe¹⁹. Hofmannsthals Europa wird somit konstitutiv zu einem „Gebilde der Kultur“, das sich von den ökonomischen Grundregeln der modernen bürgerlichen Gesellschaft distanzieren möchte, um eine andere Moderne im Sinne einer lebendigen ästhetischen Kultur hervorzurufen²⁰.

Genau wie Pannwitz stellt sich Hofmannsthal ein Europa der Kultur, oder besser einen rein *geistigen* übernationalen europäischen Organismus vor. So betrachtet ist Hofmannsthals europäische Idee mit den Argumen-

¹⁶ „Die österreichische Idee“, in: RA II, 457.

¹⁷ Man denke an Novalis' Überlegungen zur Antithese von ‚Poesie‘ und ‚Ökonomie‘ im Rahmen seiner Auseinandersetzung mit Goethes *Wilhelm Meister*. Vgl. z.B. Novalis' *Fragmente und Studien 1799-1800*, in: HKA 3, 527-694, sowie dessen Brief an Ludwig Tieck vom 23. Februar 1800, in: HKA 4, 321ff.

¹⁸ Vgl. Barbara Besslich, *Wege in den „Kulturkrieg“. Zivilisationskritik in Deutschland 1890-1914*, Darmstadt 2000.

¹⁹ Vgl. dazu auch Streim, „Deutscher Geist und europäische Kultur“, 181-7.

²⁰ In diesem Sinne ist Hofmannsthals Europa-Auffassung nicht zuletzt ein bezeichnender Ausdruck vorherrschender Strömungen der Wiener Moderne. Vgl. dazu: Carl Schorske, *Mit Geschichte denken. Übergänge in die Moderne*, Löcker 2004.

ten der in den Kriegsjahren vorherrschenden Mitteleuropa-Diskussion nicht zu verwechseln, einer Diskussion, die vor allem durch Friedrich Naumanns Buch *Mitteleuropa* von 1915 ausgelöst wurde und die sich in erster Linie mit politisch-wirtschaftlichen Themen beschäftigt²¹. Außerdem passt sich Hofmannsthal auch nicht in die nationalistischen Muster der Kriegszeit ein. Auch wenn er die Habsburger Monarchie hochhält, will er nicht hauptsächlich die *politische* Vormacht Österreichs in den Vordergrund rücken. Wie für Pannwitz stellt Österreich für Hofmannsthal eine „Idee“ dar, es bildet den Überrest einer verloren gegangenen und doch lebendigen europäischen Kultur, die insbesondere im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation geblüht habe und die es jetzt, am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts, zurückzugewinnen gelte. In seinem 1915 veröffentlichten Aufsatz *Wir Österreicher und Deutschland* bezeichnet der Autor Österreich explizit als „die besondere Aufgabe, die dem deutschen Geist in Europa gestellt wurde“ (RA II, 393), und nennt es ausdrücklich „das vom Geschick zugewiesene Feld eines rein geistigen Imperialismus“ (RA II, 394). In diesem Essay legt Hofmannsthal seine „österreichische Idee“ mit Argumenten dar, die nicht zufällig auch an Pannwitz' europäische Kulturtheorien unmittelbar erinnern:

Sieht man Österreich so, als den einen Teil des alten deutschen Imperiums, worin alle Kräfte der deutschen Geschichte lebendig und wirkend sind, so ergibt sich für die Deutschen: Österreich ist kein schlechthin Bestehendes, sondern eine ungelöste Aufgabe. Vieles, was in dem 1870 begründeten neuen Reich seine Lösung nicht finden konnte, und doch deutsche Aufgabe war, [...] soll und wird hier gelöst werden. (RA II, 393)

In Anbetracht diesen Passus' kann man zusammenfassend folgendes festhalten: Wenn Hofmannsthal nicht unbedingt das Kommen eines neuen Imperators heraufbeschwört, so liegt seinem in der Kriegszeit entworfenen Konzept eines Europa der Kultur eine Interpretation der Geschichte (und insbesondere der Geschichte der vorhergehenden hundertfünfzig Jahre) zugrunde, die der historischen Vorstellung des deutschen Kulturphilosophen Pannwitz gerade mit Blick auf die Reichs-Idee durch und durch entspricht. Ausgehend von einem gemeinsamen geschichtsphilosophischen Ansatz, der sich in der Chiffre von Österreich konkretisiert, entwickeln beide Schriftsteller in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit dem Krieg eine durchaus verwandte, romantisch angehauchte europäische Idee, die über verschiedene diskursive und ideologische Zusammenhänge bis ins frühe 20. Jahrhundert übermittelt wurde. Diese europäische

²¹ Vgl. Streim, „Deutscher Geist und europäische Kultur“, 174f.

Idee basiert auf dem Gegensatz von Kultur und Politik, Leben und Ratio, Geist und Ökonomie und wendet sich gegen den Nationalismus, Bürokratismus und Militarismus des Deutschen Reiches und in einem weiteren Sinne auch gegen die Technisierungs- und Kapitalisierungstendenzen der modernen Zeit überhaupt. Bei der Auseinandersetzung mit diesem geistigen und zugleich organischen Europa-Konzept ist es durchaus fruchtbar, nicht nur allgemein auf sein kritisches Potential und auf seine ausgesprochen kulturelle Prägung hinzuweisen, sondern auch dessen tiefe Verankerung im Kontext des Ersten Weltkriegs und in der speziellen Semantik der damit verbundenen geschichtsphilosophischen Visionen mit zu bedenken.

Europa minor. Yvan and Claire Goll's Europe

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This essay is about the configurations of “Europe” in the work of Yvan Goll (1891-1950) and Claire Goll (1890-1977). Prolific writers, translators and anthologists, the Golls wrote in German as well as in French, moving easily between the two cultures and taking on the additional roles as mediators, sometimes also translating their own work into the other language. Unsurprisingly, then, much of their creative practice concerns itself with the subject of Europe and reflects their own contribution to the international avant-garde. For this exploration, I will focus on writings from the 1920s, when the Golls were part of the inter-war avant-gardes in Paris where they came to embody avant-garde cosmopolitanism. Given the Golls’ eclecticism, these writings cover a range of genres – poetry, fiction, essays, manifestos and anthologies – and suggest that the “Europe” emerging in these texts, is at once an imaginative and discursive construct. Regarding the Golls’ “Europe”, this essay suggests three interconnected ideas: (1) the Golls’ “Europe” is closely bound up with the activist idea of internationalising the avant-garde; (2) the visions or configurations of “Europe” in their writings bring with them shifting and contradictory patterns, which I’d like to call “Europa minor”, and (3) the figure of “Europa minor” can be read as being indicative of, not just the Golls’ own biographical or intellectual itineraries, but the 1920s European avant-garde being decentred from within.

As literary mediators between Germany and France and also between European and non-European cultures, the Golls were, and still remain, fascinating figures in the European avant-garde between the wars. They were able to cut through the stereotypes of a modern identity still defined by national belonging or language, crossed geographical, cultural and artistic borders and engendered international, even global transfer. At the same time, the Golls embody some of the national and ethnic tensions of European culture. Coming from assimilated Jewish backgrounds in Lorraine and Franconia, Southern Germany, respectively, both left Wilhelmine Germany during the First World War for Switzerland. A vital part of the exile community there, they were active in the anti-war move-

ment and published their own work and translations in pacifist journals. Their pacifism translated into an internationalising, European outlook, as can be seen in Yvan's cycle of poems, *Requiem. Für die Gefallenen Europas* (Zurich 1917), while Claire became committed to supporting the international women's cause.¹ Following the end of the war and the abortive attempts at political revolution in Germany, the Golls based themselves in Paris where they came to play important roles in the international avant-garde. In 1919, Yvan published the anthology *Le Cœur de l'ennemi. Poèmes actuels traduits de l'allemand*, which included his translations of pacifist or pro-French poems by, among other, Becher, Ehrenstein, Hasenclever, Schickele and Zweig. A counterpart was published a year later. Edited and translated by both Golls, *Das Herz Frankreichs. Eine Anthologie französischer Freiheitshyrik* contained recent French poetry with an internationalist and pacifist outlook, by, among others, Guilbeaux, Rolland, Romain and Vildrac. These anthologies of French and German poetry in translation were clearly aimed at bilateral reconciliation in the wake of the Versailles Treaty. Each anthology blended modernist poetry with internationalist politics, and both these aspects are linked in the enterprise of cultural translation. Translation, including auto-translation, marks of course also much of the Golls' own creative work, which may perhaps be a contributing factor to the fact that this work remains awkwardly positioned between the German and French literatures.

When the Golls use the term "Europe" in this early post-war period, they do so to make a statement against the violence of nationalisms experienced during the war. On the surface, then, "Europe" translates pacifist, internationalist activism into the artistic arena and becomes a byword for an avant-garde which similarly strives to overcome national divisions in art, culture and politics. But on closer inspection it becomes evident that their use of the term "Europe" also reflects the recent experience of the avant-garde. First, the fact that parts of the German, French and Italian pre-war avant-garde were absorbed into nationalist politics during the war provided a powerful impetus for the Golls to attempt to de-nationalise the European avant-garde. Secondly, even where the cultural avant-garde were invoking a supranational Europe beyond the individual fatherlands, the Golls took issue with the hypocritical universalism involved in this kind of vision. In particular, they regarded as

¹ Claire's war-time publications include the novellas collected in *Die Frauen erwachen* (1918) and some 15 articles on the struggle of women during the war. Her work from that period is collected in Claire Goll, *Der Gläserne Garten. Prosa von 1917 bis 1919*, ed. Barbara Glauert-Hesse, Berlin 1989.

dangerous an idea of a Europe which takes its own concept of humanity as universal. Yvan Goll in particular took German expressionism to task for its moralising appeals to “Menschheit”, its blindness to the Eurocentric assumptions inherent in those appeals, and its inclination to take its own local German positions as universal.² And finally, for them, the term “Europe”, came to designate the attempt to overcome divisions which had been emerging within the post-war avant-garde itself. In his own surrealist manifesto, published in October 1924, which is contemporaneous with Breton’s more famous one, Yvan claimed: “Le surréalisme ne se contente pas d’être le moyen d’expression d’un groupe ou d’un pays; il sera international, il absorbera tous les ismes qui partagent l’Europe”.³ With this attempt at de-nationalising the avant-gardes, Goll envisaged a kind of international collaboration across national and linguistic borders. Inspired by Apollinaire’s idea of creative simultaneity, surrealism for Goll meant a cinematic collage poetry energised by the visual cultures and expressing in novel languages and forms the fluctuating spirit of modernity. For the Golls, to be modern meant to be international, which simultaneously meant to be European.

In these early post-war projects, “Europe” becomes a supranational space for avant-garde experimentation, based on transnational exchange, migration and collaboration. However, the very idea of translation between languages and cultures implies the presence of a cultural space marked by linguistic difference. In the Golls’ construction, “Europe” begins to function like a chronotope, a spatial or geographical signifier that takes on temporal dimensions, and *vice versa*. If Europe refers to a trans- or supranational space, then that reference is dependent upon the continued existence of national territories and cultures. Similarly, if “Europe” has a forward-looking, futurist dimension, it also is bound up with the past and the petty nationalisms which continue to exist in the wake of Versailles. The various aspects of that chronotope then become part and parcel of the Goll’s Europeanising rhetoric, and their asymmetry suggests that this kind of rhetoric is liable to become shifting and contradictory. I would now like to turn to some of those shifts and contradictions.

The Golls’ Europeanising rhetoric involves, paradoxically, introducing more differences into an already divided space. Key here is an aggressive primitivizing strategy. This primitivizing allows the Golls to imagine dif-

² See, for example, his essay “Der Expressionismus stirbt”, in: *Zenit* (Zagreb), 8, October 1921, 8-9.

³ “manifeste [sic] du surrealisme”, in: *Surréalisme* (Paris), October 1924, 2.

ferent cultural zones within Europe and map new connections between the putative “centre” and the assumed “periphery”. In the early 1920s, for example, Yvan identified East European poetries as a positive, fresh and original force which might help revitalise an exhausted, unoriginal West European avant-garde. When Yvan presented his own translations of Russian poetry by Aleksandr Blok, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Sergey Yesenin and others into German and French, he emphasised to his Western readers the cultural otherness and difference inherent in these poems. Goll's rhetoric was once more derived from the European chronotope. He stressed links between these contemporary poems and an archaic Russia, which for him becomes more vital than present-day Western Europe and can act as a revolutionary, or at least transformative, force in contemporary Europe.⁴ He framed these poetries not only in national and linguistic terms (as Russian), but used terms such as “barbaric”, “Mongolian”, “Asiatic”, which metonymically extend the reach of his geographical discourse and render it ethnographic. One could argue here that Goll was simply adopting a well-known strategy in modernist or avant-garde primitivism. But if he did, then he injected a critical difference. Whereas primitivism is frequently also about asserting European superiority over “other” territories and cultures, Goll's configuration of “Russia” points to a possible means by which that kind of superiority of the West over the East might be undone. Blok in particular seemed to him to capture something of the more primitive, de-Europeanising forces in a world in which the Western concept of space and time is but one among many: “Die schöne Kraft, der als erster von den Modernen Alexander Blok die *Skythen* widmete. Der Urmensch, mit dem dunklen Jahrhundertblut und den unheimlichen Augen tritt aus Urwäldern des Äquators hervor und aus den Steppen des Pols: mit Mond- und Sonnengeheimnissen. Er tanzt über die Meridiane des Globus”.⁵ The “Urmensch” personifies this injunction to confront the more vitalist and primitivist aspects of post-war culture. More than merely an inspiration, this figure also comes to allegorise the European avant-garde poet. In a kind of geographical pincer movement from the tropical South and the polar North, the European avant-garde may subvert Europe from without. Moreover, the strategic dislocation of the avant-garde involves a violation

⁴ “Russische Revolutionslyrik”, in: *Menschen. Clarté* (Dresden), 3, July 1921, 33-4. Between May and July 1922, Goll was literary editor of this journal, which was associated with the international “Clarté” movement.

⁵ “Der Expressionismus stirbt”, 9. The reference is to Blok's long poem *The Scythians* (1918), which appeared in German translation two years later. Beginning with this issue, Goll became co-editor of *Zenit* and remained co-editor until April 1922.

of Western cartography, which in turn is closely bound up with a bodily performance. Enriched by de-Europeanising forces, the avant-garde becomes endowed with an uncanny vision (*mit unheimlichen Augen*), and able to stage a bodily protest against the uniformity of Western vision.

In the same year that her husband began publishing his translations of the Russian poets, Claire Goll anthologised her own translations of North American poetry. Entitled *Die Neue Welt. Eine Anthologie jüngster amerikanischer Lyrik*, the book included socially aware poems by, for example, Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters.

Next to these, Vachel Lindsay was represented with an excerpt from his epic poem “Congo”, and cast as a modern American troubadour – an attribution which serves to Europeanise and primitivise at the same time. Goll also presented samples of Native American and Black American songs. In her foreword, Claire deployed a rhetoric similar to that of her husband when he emphasised the reinvigorating primitivisms coming from Europe’s Eastern periphery. Her rhetoric serves to extend the geographical limits of “America” when she eulogises the gauchos at work and imagines buffaloes and elephants roaming the jungle. What’s important here is not the accuracy of her geographical imagination, but its function in relation to the European chronotope. The New World poetry in Claire’s anthology is primarily meant to renew European culture by showcasing the New World as “das Land einer Zukunft”; by contrast and by extension, the land of *the* future, according to Claire (and to many left-wing artists and intellectuals at the time), was Russia.⁶

Bracketed in these ways by America and the East, “Europe” becomes strategically displaced from within by the Paris-based avant-garde translators. Such a displacement from the putative central location can be read as a critique of the West European avant-garde for being blind to the primitivisms at its margins and beyond. Much more than the earlier Franco-German anthologies, these later translations appear to go against the hubris of the West European master cultures and the arrogance with which they consider their languages as the voice of humanity.

The notion of “Europa minor”, then, enters the Golls’ shifting and sometimes contradictory rhetoric. I have derived the term from a phrase

⁶ *Die Neue Welt. Eine Anthologie jüngster amerikanischer Lyrik*, Berlin 1921, 10: “Heute ist Europa mehr denn je auf die unerschöpflichen Borne jüngerer Länder angewiesen. Es lieh einmal Geld, heute entleiht es neues Blut in Amerika gegen alten Geist. Auch von dort wird ihm Verjüngung kommen. Denn die ‚Neue Welt‘ ist nur das Land *einer* Zukunft, das Land der Zukunft aber ist Rußland”. Goll alludes to Hegel’s famous attribution of America as “das Land der Zukunft”, in *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke*, Bd. 12, Frankfurt am Main 1986, 114.

Goll used in a letter to Ljubomir Micić, the Zagreb-based writer and founder of the avant-garde journal *Zenit*. In that letter, Goll's phrase "kleines Europa" refers to the new nations emerging in Central and Eastern Europe after the demise of Habsburg and is meant to underpin his belief that writers from these emerging nations would not only assimilate the avant-garde ideas coming from Paris or Berlin, but transform them into something European.⁷ We can see how the concept still draws on ideas about the commonality of European culture, yet also begins to challenge that culture's geographical terms of reference.

For Goll's correspondent Micić, zenithism meant a new barbarism in art and culture, personified by the "Barbarogenius" – primeval man who hails from the Balkans and wider Eastern Europe. Linked with this was the demand for a balkanisation of Europe – that is, the collapse of the capitalist West and its replacement through the primitivising force of an authentic Balkan culture.⁸ For Micić, the geographical term "Balkan" becomes an aggressive, ethnically charged watchword against Western decadence, humanism and materialism, and Goll subscribed to those ideas for a spiritual renewal of and through international artistic collaboration.

There is, however, a crucial difference, and once more this comes down to the use of the European chronotope. Whereas Micić privileges one cultural region (the Balkans) over the rest of Europe, Goll is more interested in new horizontal cultural relations across Europe. Whereas Micić substitutes for one hierarchy – the stereotypical view of the enlightenend West and its superiority over and rationalising mission for the irrational East – an avant-garde one, in which the parameters and values are reversed, Goll sees "Europe minor" in non-hierarchical terms, so that categories such as centre and periphery become interchangeable. In the conventional model also adhered to by much of the avant-garde, developments in a cultural centre such as Paris would eventually ripple out to more remote and outlying locations. Although the term "klein" or "minor" suggests valorisation and hierarchy, the way in which Goll deploys ideas about "Europa minor" points to a breaking-down of hierarchies. His term, and his activities as editor, translator and anthologist indicate an avant-garde Europe conceived as a topographical network, with cultural traffic flowing in various directions at once and thereby challenging the claims of precedence or superiority.⁹

⁷ Micić printed this letter in the inaugural issue of *Zenit*, 1, February 1921, 3.

⁸ See Ljubomir Micić, "Barbarogenije", in: *Zenit*, 26-33, October 1924.

⁹ The same kind of argument for rethinking of the old centre/periphery model can be found in Goll's article "Eine europäische Literaturgeschichte", in *Berliner-Börsen-Courier*, 29 August 1925. This article is an extensive review of Guillermo de Torre's *Literaturas Europeas de*

Goll's collage poem *Paris brennt: Ein Poem nebst einem Postkartenalbum*, first published in Zagreb under the auspices of Micić's journal, may be read as a demonstration of that idea.¹⁰ This is a fast-moving urban collage text, whose first edition also incorporated a number of postcards. Paris becomes an amalgamation of sights and sounds, slogans, images, impressions and voices, recorded or otherwise conveyed by a mobilised and at times strangely disembodied poet. In addition to becoming multisensory, the text becomes multilingual as it collages other Paris poems by Blaise Cendrars, Valentin Parnach and Vicente Huidobro, in French, Russian and Spanish respectively. Referencing Apollinaire's "Zone" and Micić's zenithist agenda, the text becomes intertextual, self-consciously taking avant-garde practices into a new territory. Images and snapshots of circulation and disruption, vitality and blockage abound, from the flows of traffic, advertising and commodities to more traumatic stoppages through accidents, crowds and more symbolic kinds of upheaval, such as the eponymous burning. Elsewhere, the text symbolically connects Parisian landmarks and squares with other European and world cities. Moving between location and dislocation, the poem figures an avant-garde fascination with a Paris which turns into a shifting signifier of a more global kind of cultural economy, in which fixity has been replaced by flow and which means the European avant-garde subject becomes deterritorialised. The poem then illustrates a "barbarism", not just of the Balkan or Eastern variety, but of a global kind. Among the many allegorical roles that Paris plays here, is that of a vessel at sea. In our context, such playful references to the French capital's coat of arms may be read as suggestive of the kinds of dislocation that Goll is after. Furthermore, if the city, its urban landscape, its art and culture have been metonymically figured as a ship at sea, then perhaps the barbaric European avant-garde figures itself as a mobile space in transition, unbound by prevailing norms. According to Michel Foucault, the ship is a key trope of heterotopia, a space temporarily outside social and political power, though still intimately

Vanguardia (Madrid 1925). Torre, a Spanish avant-garde practitioner, acknowledges in his book Goll's role in opening up what he calls the avant-garde's "other horizons" (otros horizontes, 336-65).

¹⁰ „Paris brennt“, in Goll, *Die Lyrik in vier Bänden*, Bd. 1: *Frühe Gedichte 1906-1930*, ed. Barbara Glauert-Hesse, Göttingen 1996, 185-200. For a comparison of the various editions and the various techniques used by Goll, see Johannes Ullmaier, *Yvan Golls Gedicht 'Paris brennt'. Zur Bedeutung von Collage, Montage und Simultanismus als Gestaltungsverfahren der Avantgarde*, Tübingen 1995.

linked with the globalising forces of modernity as registered by Goll's nomadic poet.¹¹

In other projects by the Golls, "Europa minor" can be seen to challenge ideas about European superiority over non-European cultures. We already saw to an extent how this plays out in relation to the European periphery. The strategy plays out also in regard to the spaces of global culture, as Yvan's *Les cinq continents*, his astonishing and ambitious anthology of contemporary world poetry demonstrates. Here, Goll inscribes "Europe" in the world map of five continents. What's more, in an attempt to denationalise the new global poetry, the five continents have become five major language groups, most of which comprise more than one continent. The various sections are arranged in such a way that they perform a geographical (and a geo-historical) movement in which "Europe", and "Western Europe" in particular, are consistently framed and bracketed by other poetries and cultures. As a result, the narrative of world poetry that Goll presents here, calls into question the long-assumed centrality of "Europe". The Anglo-Saxon section begins with Anglophone poets from the US, before moving to England and then to Ireland. The Latin group begins with French and Belgian poets, moving to Italian, Spanish (Castilian), Catalan, South American poetries before adding Portuguese, Greek, Romanian poems. The Germanic and the Slavic groups perform a vortex-like geographical movement across Europe, ending with the Czech, Hungarian, and Serbocroat poets, who are once more equated with avant-garde primitivism. The "Oriental" section blurs the boundaries between languages and national and ethnic groups; beginning with Japan and China to include Indian, Jewish, Turkish and Armenian voices and concludes with the Native Americans from the American Southwest, to the "Negroes" of Africa. In other words, Goll's world anthology maps Europe as relatively minor; the putative central languages and poetries are bracketed, propped up by the American and African poetries, and each of the more unambiguously European sections ends in a minor language. Goll aimed for this veritable "mappemonde" to enable the reader to crisscross national borders and spaces, irrespective of their own location and replace national literatures with an "art mondial" based on continual cultural translation.¹² The translations and manifestoes

¹¹ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" (1967), in: *Diacritics*, 16, Spring 1986, 22-27; 27.

¹² "Avant-propos", in: *Les cinq continents. Anthologie mondiale de poésie contemporaine*, Paris 1922, 6-13, esp. 9 and 12. Elsewhere in his foreword, Goll models this kind of cultural translation on the new possibilities afforded by international transport and communication (pages 6-7). For a discussion of 'art mondial' and its ramifications, see Heike Schmidt, *Art mondial. Formen der Internationalität bei Yvan Goll*, Würzburg 1999, 71-90.

constantly seek to establish new points of departure for European culture, by displacing “Europe” and the assumptions that underpin it, to the periphery. As in Goll’s Paris poem, “Europe” is re-imagined as an effect of global modernity, and not as its origin.

Apart from translations, essays and manifestos, the Golls published several novels which revolve, in one way or another, around the chronotope of Europe. These novels, as well as the complex history of their publication in French and German, which sometimes involved auto-translation, have received a relatively large amount of critical attention. What interests me here is how in these novels, the Golls take the model of “Europa minor” to an allegorical level. My example here is Claire’s novel *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa* (1926). Set in contemporary Paris, the plot revolves around the brief marriage of Jupiter Djilbouti, a high-ranking Senegalese official in the French colonial ministry, to Alma Valéry, a young Franco-Swedish woman and daughter of a diplomat. Their marriage is described in the novel as symbolising the union of two continents.¹³ Yet as the title suggest, the novel re-writes the myth of Europa. Also present are references to Othello, as well as a sustained play on Jupiter’s moon Europa. Within this structure of borrowings and reversals, Goll’s novel also introduces the twin themes of gender and race. The plot is essentially a multiple process of othering, which allows each partner to act out myths and fantasies of power and possession, and performance and role-playing are key. Much of the discussion of this novel has focussed on the question whether Goll subverts or reinforces European stereotypes about Africans and their culture or not.¹⁴ We have both: Jupiter is aware of the daily racism he faces, and the novel suggests many analogies between him and European Jews. He is rich, successful and educated, yet also in thrall to native fetishes and his own physical needs, while despising lower-class blacks who work in the Parisian entertainment industry. The references to Jupiter’s superiority over Europe/European civilisation often come down to greater vitality and sensuality. Jupiter has also completely internalised colonialist discourse,

¹³ Claire Goll, *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa*, Berlin [1926]1987, 74.

¹⁴ Joachim Schultz, „Das Afrika- und ‚Neger‘-Bild in den Werken von Claire und Ivan Goll“, in: *Actes du XIII^e Congrès de l’Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée / Proceedings of the 12th AILC Congress*, Munich 1985, 341-8; Moray McGowan, „Black and White? Claire Goll’s *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa*“, in: Eric Robertson & Robert Vilain (eds.), *Yvan Goll – Claire Goll. Texts and Contexts*, Amsterdam-Atlanta 1997, 205-18; Monika Albrecht, „Europa ist nicht die Welt? Literatur der Weimarer Republik aus postkolonialer Sicht (Stefan Zweig, Claire und Ivan Goll, B. Traven)“, in: Gustav Frank et. al. (eds.), *Modern Times? German Literature and the Arts beyond Political Chronologies. Kontinuitäten der Kultur 1925-1955*, Bielefeld 2005, 73-92.

returning it in violent form to his own people and the Europeans. He ultimately turns it also against Alma, as he becomes her jealous murderer. The novel is perhaps best seen in the context of avant-garde “negrophilia”, whereby European and Africans are portrayed as owning positive and negative stereotypical views about each other, and their mutual attraction is shown to feed off differences rather than similarities.¹⁵ As a result, then, the overall allegory of the interdependence of self and other, Europe and Africa, attraction and repulsion is not without its lapses and reversals, which may be seen as the novelistic equivalent of the trope of “Europa minor”. Claire’s novel goes some way towards challenging some elements of Eurocentric discourse about Africans and their culture. Much like the city in Yvan’s poem, Paris becomes an allegorical space for this kind of speaking about “Europe minor”. This mode allows the minoritising of Europe as well as the more stereotypical demonising or exorcising of the “Other”.

Elsewhere, both Golls show a genuine attempt to understand the complex ways in which white and black cultures, oppressors and oppressed have become mutually interdependent. In his comments about black culture in Paris and Berlin, Goll once more depicts Africans as a reinvigorating cultural force, celebrating Josephine Baker and other performers for bringing physicality and bodily performance to Europe (much like the avant-garde Urmensch dancing over the globe’s meridian he celebrated in “Der Expressionismus stirbt”). At the same time, Goll is acutely aware that such performances of black culture in Europe, and its celebration by the European avant-garde, were part of the social and economic rationalisation of the body.¹⁶ Living in France, he and his wife were also keenly aware of Africa’s brutal history of colonial oppression and the enforced displacement of its people, and both supported and disseminated critiques of French and European colonialism.¹⁷ While the Golls shared the broader primitivism among the European avant-garde, and embraced the “Other” so as to be able to reinvigorate and re-imagine European culture, they were at the same time aware of the more complex inter-

¹⁵ For a broad-based survey, see: Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia. Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, London 2000.

¹⁶ Yvan Goll, „Die Neger erobern Paris“, in: *Neues Wiener Journal*, 11074, 17 September 1924, and „Die Neger erobern Europa“, in: *Die literarische Welt*, 3, 15 January 1926.

¹⁷ Claire Goll translated René Maran, *Batouala. Ein echter Negerroman* (Basel 1922) as *Batouala, un véritable roman nègre* (Paris 1921). Maran’s book had won the Prix Goncourt. Yvan translated Albert Londres, *Schwarz und weiß: Die Wahrheit über Afrika* (Vienna-Berlin 1929, original: *Terre d’ébène: La traite des noirs*, Paris 1929).

dependencies between Europe and the rest of the world that played out in the arena of culture.

“Europe” for the Golls, then, is dependent on an idea of a common culture, but this culture becomes strategically re-positioned vis-à-vis its putative centre and origin. For the Golls, the commonality of that culture is essentially one of perpetual displacement. It resides not within a bound geographic space or a fixed cultural time, but in the willingness and readiness to unbind and unfix the European chronotope. In their attempt to keep up with the cultural and economic forces of modernisation, the European avant-garde finds itself “at large” in a shrinking world.¹⁸ This is a spatial model in which Europe itself can be said to have become minor, just as the European avant-garde has become “minor” when placed within and against the global cultural economy and transnational processes of migration and circulation. Crucially, the trope of “Europa minor” challenges the self-appointed centrality and false universalism that underpins European identity and civilisation. “Europa minor”, then, may go some way towards imagining a “Europe” which is free from the kind of pernicious universalism that underpins its own construction. Aware of the complex issues involved in the “European” chronotope, questioning claims to European superiority and anteriority over others culture, and trying to embed cultural translation within it, the Golls write “Europa minor” as a spatial and temporal network where avant-garde traffic can flow in various directions at once. The Golls were able to do this for very specific reasons; as multilingual writers, with an experience of exile and displacement from their “own” culture, they tried to understand and shape the cultural economy of the European avant-garde in the 1920s.

Our survey of the Goll’s (de-)Europeanising discourse begs one final question. What kind of critical challenge to avant-garde studies, if any, can be associated to this mode of “Europa minor”? For all its sometimes contradictory associations, the figure of “Europa minor” points to the fact that an awareness of alternative modernities is firmly a part of the Goll’s avant-garde practice. In extending the geographies of the Paris-based avant-garde, the Golls were conscious of the many layers and hierarchies that exist within transnational cultural exchange. Some of their writings and their activities, for example their de-colonialising stance, may be constructed as going some way towards addressing the lack of reciprocity

¹⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*, Minneapolis-London 1996.

that has so often come to characterise such cultural exchange.¹⁹ I would like to suggest that the Golls' model of "Europa minor" may fruitfully be read in terms of a "becoming-minoritarian" of the European avant-garde. As theorised by Gilles Deleuze, "becoming-minoritarian" is a key element in the political thinking of post-structuralism. It is conceived as an oppositional strategy whereby marginalised subjects and suppressed imaginaries are thought to have the potential to eventually destabilise a dominant social order.²⁰ For Deleuze, such potential for destabilisation occurs at the very limits of social, cultural and psychic locations produced by that order and through extreme distortions of affect, desire and language. In post-structuralist politics, such potentially destabilising effects are sometimes associated with Europe's Other, the so-called Third World, and the presence of its subjects and languages within Europe.²¹ The Golls' trope of "Europa minor" appears to anticipate some elements of that "becoming-minoritarian", invoking European alongside non-European imaginaries and establishing shifting and contradictory relations among them. A more detailed study than is possible here would have to show how and why the avant-garde modes in the 1920s became attached to a "dominant culture" and how modes of thinking and writing "Europe" in minoritarian terms could assume some destabilising potential. Clearly, the supranational, utopian dimensions of the Golls' vision of avant-garde collaboration remained largely unfulfilled, but their emphasis on the minoritarian aspects amounts to an injunction to imagine placement as a form of displacement, European identity as a form of non-European alterity engendered by the avant-garde. As such, "Europa minor" is an indication of how to keep the avant-garde's own status within an advanced capitalist society under permanent review.

¹⁹ Cf. Andreas Huyssen, "Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World", in: Peter Brooker & Andrew Thacker (eds.), *Geographies of Modernism. Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, London-New York 2005, 6-18.

²⁰ For a contemporary reading of that theory, see Rosi Braidotti, "The Becoming-Minoritarian of Europe", in Ian Buchanan & Adrian Parr (eds.), *Deleuze and the Contemporary World*, Edinburgh 2006, 79-94.

²¹ Caren Kaplan has suggested that those "Third World" spaces serve a purely metaphorical function and that European-based post-structuralism is guilty of perpetuating colonialist discourse in a globalising world. As a result, she aligns the figure of 'becoming minor' squarely with the Modernist project and its attendant geographies. Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Durham 1996, esp. 88-90.

La revue *Zenit* : une avant-garde entre particularisme identitaire et internationalisme

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Les années 1920 constituent une époque importante dans l'histoire de l'art des avant-gardes européennes avec la mise en place d'une nouvelle géographie artistique qui fait apparaître la question de l'identité culturelle au sein de leur idéologie. Les artistes s'appuient sur un réseau de revues, caractérisé par l'échange de textes, de reproductions, d'auteurs et de publicités. Pivot des réseaux artistiques et tribune partisane, la revue légitime un groupe ou des artistes, et en tant que support d'un engagement et de stratégies avant-gardistes, elle se présente, comme la source indispensable de l'histoire de la diffusion et des relations artistiques. Objet esthétique, la revue développe de nouvelles pratiques remettant en cause les statuts respectifs du texte et de l'image, et participe aux décloisonnements des arts. Si les avant-gardes de la première moitié du XX^e siècle ont conscience de leur responsabilité collective en tant que chercheurs de sens et de leur fonction sociale, c'est-à-dire, comme le souligne Renato Poggioli, « l'auto-conscience de l'avant-garde est son existence »¹, l'idée du rapprochement de l'art et de la vie devient une constante au sein des mouvements et les conduit à penser à un langage universel afin de préserver les liens sociaux. Malgré le programme délibérément international, les avant-gardes sont confrontées au problème de l'identité et de son incidence sur les relations artistiques à un moment où la rapidité de circulation des informations réduit les distances géographiques. Dans cette relation paradoxale entre identité/singularité et internationalisme, la vocation de l'avant-garde consiste à ouvrir des possibilités nouvelles à la création, à préserver les particularismes et à s'engager dans une logique de rupture et de renouvellement, marquant un changement avec le modernisme et son principe d'universalité, essentiellement occidental-centrique, excluant une partie du monde et une partie de l'Europe. Les caractères propres de la

1 Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Cambridge, Mass. 1968, 216.

revue *Zenit*, ses propositions originales pour dynamiser la culture, ses écarts délibérés dans la réception des œuvres, s'introduisent dans cette *communitas*³ des avant-gardes plus imaginaire que réelle pour en souligner leur perméabilité, ainsi que la circulation des paradigmes artistiques dans le réseau de périodiques auquel appartient *Zenit*. L'étude d'une revue permet de questionner la nature de l'avant-garde, véritable rhizome, c'est-à-dire un système ouvert de « multiplicités »⁴. A la fois singulière et exemplaire, *Zenit* développe une théorie du renouveau et de la régénération de la culture tout en recevant et traduisant les exemples des avant-gardes européennes d'une manière personnelle. Le paradoxe que Ljubomir Micić affiche au sein de sa revue, coïncide avec l'ouverture de celle-ci aux différents mouvements et soutient ce principe d'« élasticité » comme une composante essentielle de l'internationalisme des avant-gardes.

« Barbarogénie », « Balkaniser » : identité et imaginaire

Après la première guerre mondiale, un nouveau réseau de périodiques se constitue à l'Est de l'Europe, propageant rapidement les informations sur la création contemporaine. La revue *Zenit*, éditée entre 1921 et 1923 à Zagreb, puis entre 1924 et 1926 à Belgrade, permet d'étudier un mouvement, le zénitisme, représenté par Micić auquel se joindront d'autres artistes, plasticiens, et poètes dont la collaboration variera jusqu'au dernier numéro de la revue. L'examen des textes de Ljubomir Micić montre comment l'utilisation de métaphores, de termes choisis et le maniement de principes contradictoires servent à lutter contre l'image d'une uniformité de l'avant-garde et à refuser le nivellement des expériences esthétiques. Les idées de Micić puisent dans l'histoire du peuple « yougoslave », marquée par les particularismes et les luttes nationales contre la domination des Empires ottoman et austro-hongrois que les peuples des Balkans avaient subie. Pendant les guerres balkaniques (1912-1913), une alliance entre les peuples des Balkans ou *Ligue balkanique* s'est constituée traduisant le combat commun à mener. Cependant, après la victoire sur l'empire ottoman, les oppositions ont ressurgi et les nationalismes se sont exacer-

2 Nous renvoyons à l'étude complète de *Zenit* du catalogue de l'exposition *Zenit i avangard dvadesetih godina* rédigé par Irina Subotić et Vida Golubovic, Belgrade, Musée National 1983.

3 Au début des années 1920, des publications telles que *Buch neuer Künstler* de László de Moholy-Nagy et Lajos Kassák (Vienne 1922) et celle de Hans Arp et El Lissitzky, *Les ismes de l'art. The isms of art* (Erlenburg-München-Leipzig 1925), tendent à proposer une vision des avant-gardes comme un ensemble communautaire.

4 Gilles Deleuze et Felix Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, Paris 1980, 31.

bés. Après la première guerre mondiale, les traités de paix ont considérablement bouleversé la géographie des Balkans⁵, et les Slaves du sud, Serbes, Croates et Slovènes, ont formé un nouvel état, la Yougoslavie. Néanmoins, à l'issue de la guerre, les sentiments nationalistes inter-balkaniques ont remplacé le problème de l'indépendance auquel vont s'ajouter les idéologies de l'entre deux guerres, communisme et fascisme. L'usage du terme Balkans s'est généralisé au XIX^e siècle avec une lourde charge idéologique; ainsi les « Balkans » deviennent alors synonymes de complexité nationale, de conflits sans fin, d'éclatement et de morcellement et la « balkanisation » la marque identitaire majeure de cette partie de l'Europe. Beaucoup de stéréotypes font irruption dans l'imaginaire occidental, depuis le XIX^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours et resurgissent régulièrement. Partie de l'Europe, les Balkans font figure de l'Autre, de l'image réduite et inversée de l'Europe où la question des nationalismes demeure prégnante. Après le premier conflit mondial, l'application du principe des nationalités marquera l'histoire européenne en redessinant les frontières afin de doter chaque nationalité de son territoire et de son état, mais toutes les minorités ne peuvent pas être tout entières contenues dans le territoire qui leur est affecté ; cette situation engendre des tensions et fait naître la notion de « minorités nationales ». Dans ce cadre historique où la vision occidentale des Balkans est associée à celle de la « balkanisation », de ce processus d'éclatement, le zénitisme de Ljubomir Micić détourne cette image en l'érigeant en principe contre les valeurs et la suprématie des modèles occidentaux. De fait, la revue *Zenit* propose une autre voie que celle du paradigme dominant, et Micić conçoit la « balkanisation » totale de l'Europe comme une libération de l'art tout en véhiculant les idées des avant-gardes du moment, tels expressionnisme, dada, constructivisme. A l'inverse, le terme de balkan employé par Micić renvoie à l'unité géographique et idéologique de cette partie de l'Europe, et suppose le dépassement des antagonismes et des particularismes de cette région. Parallèlement, la revue met en avant le dualisme culturel entre l'occident « rationnel » et le « barbare balkan », la provocation de l'identité par l'altérité, et manie le paradoxe, véritable constituant de la revue et reflet de la personnalité contradictoire de Micić, poète radical, critique, typographe, éditeur, collectionneur et agitateur.

Le 21 juin 1921 paraît le manifeste zénitiste, publié en allemand, français et en serbo-croate dans un numéro special de la revue et signé par

5 En raison de la disparition des Empires.

Micić, Boško Tokin⁶ et Ivan Goll. Annonçant que « L'expressionnisme, le cubisme et le futurisme sont morts », le zénitisme déclarait s'inscrire dans cette voie moderniste tout en la poussant plus avant, grâce aux forces de la culture « barbare » et le caractère slave des Balkans. L'utilisation d'une terminologie forte et d'un ton vindicatif et provocateur, place le zénitisme dans l'avant-garde internationale. L'idéologie de Micić s'appuie sur celle du « barbarogénie », l'homme non-civilisé, non rationnel qui reste « libre à la mode des barbares ». Ce « surhomme » balkan s'est hissé en dehors de la civilisation européenne pour émanciper la culture et débarrasser l'homme de la civilisation européenne. Après la guerre, le même constat d'échec de la civilisation européenne et de l'humanisme que font Micić et les dadaïstes, les poussent à revendiquer la destruction totale de tout principe et de tout système pour revendiquer les sources de l'imaginaire. L'idée conductrice du zénitisme est de proposer aux balkans, ce « sixième continent »⁷, de dé-civiliser l'Europe, de la « balkaniser » pour la libérer et enfin la régénérer grâce à « la délivrance parfaite de l'imaginaire culture »⁸. Le programme zénitiste oscille entre nihilisme culturel et nouvelle civilisation à construire sous la forme d'une « barbarisation ». Accusée d'être éclectique, *Zenit* propose une synthèse qui permet à Micić d'agir dans les interstices des mouvements. Si, dans un premier temps, la provocation, le refus d'adhérer à un courant et une recherche typographique le rapprochent des dadaïstes, l'agressivité et l'attitude antibourgeoise des futuristes, l'aspiration à une nouvelle fraternité, et à l'« unité cosmique » se réfèrent davantage à l'expressionnisme ; il s'intéresse ensuite à l'opposition entre « barbare balkan » et l'occident, pour finir par s'orienter vers l'internationalisme européen. L'objectif de Micić est de participer au concert des avant-gardes européennes, comme l'indique l'usage de sa terminologie, « Homme Nouveau », « Esprit Nouveau », « Art Nouveau », « Révolution » tout en proposant sa propre version, et mettant en avant « l'élan vital », l'énergie positive qu'incarne à ses yeux le barbarogénie dont l'objectif est de lutter contre la décadence européenne, « contre l'Europe cadavérique »⁹ pour retrouver une unité, un nouvel humanisme.

6 Boško Tokin (1894-1953), poète et cinéaste, s'était lié d'amitié avec Ivan Goll en Allemagne et à Paris.

7 Ljubomir Micić, « Manifeste aux barbares d'esprit et de la pensée sur tous les continents », in : *Zenit*, 38, février 1926, 6-8. Ce texte a été publié en serbo-croate et en français, il est daté du 25 octobre 1925.

8 Ljubomir Micić, « Manifeste aux barbares d'esprit », 6.

9 Ljubomir Micić, in : *Zenit*, n° 43, n.p.

Dans les années 1920, comme l'analyse Andrzej Turowski¹⁰, deux formules culturelles, celle de l'occidentalisation et celle de l'orientalisation, coexistent au sein de l'avant-garde est-européenne dont les programmes possèdent des traits communs, par exemple une inclinaison pour les utopies socio-artistiques. La vision d'un monde fraternel uni dont l'art serait un des vecteurs se retrouve dans le manifeste zénitiste et dans d'autres textes de Micić. Si « les Balkans sont le PONT entre l'Est et l'Ouest », la nouvelle « conception humaniste universelle slave orientale apportera la renaissance à l'Europe et élèvera l'idée de l'Homme »¹¹. Micić présente les Balkans comme le lieu où sont conciliables deux cultures inconciliables, orient-occident, dont les sphères d'influence respectives ont imprégné cette région : les Croates et les Slovènes dans celle de la culture européenne occidentale, les serbes dans celle de l'orient russe. Grâce au zénitisme, « la révolution barbare de l'esprit, la révolution barbare de la pensée, la révolution barbare de tous les sentiments » qui se détourne de l'occident et de ses mythes culturels, par exemple Paris, évoqué dans le manifeste, Micić s'oppose à la rhétorique industrialiste des manifestes avant-gardistes, et sa révolte contre la culture a comme objectif de délivrer « l'imaginaire culture »¹² pour atteindre « tous les domaines de la pensée indépendante, dans tous les domaines de l'esprit libéré »¹³. La position interventionniste de *Zenit* qui vante la transformation de la vie par l'art, « l'organisation de l'esprit nouveau doit pénétrer dans la vie »¹⁴, s'accompagne d'une critique du rationalisme et de la bourgeoisie, ayant mené à la guerre. De fait, Micić repense la place de l'imaginaire et ses liens avec un certain « matérialisme », c'est-à-dire son contact avec le réel et non une pensée dialectique.

Les changements apportés au sous-titre soulignent les transformations éditoriales et l'oscillation entre l'importance accordée réciproquement à l'imaginaire et à la visée sociale et politique de l'art. Avec comme sous-titre « revue internationale » du premier au dernier numéro, des variations sont ensuite ajoutées, « pour l'art et la culture » du numéro 1 au numéro 3, « pour l'art nouveau » du 4 au 15, dans le double numéro 17/18 « pour le zénitisme et l'art nouveau », ensuite l'orientation sociale se précise avec l'extension du sous-titre « un calendrier pour l'art nouveau et la vie contemporaine » du numéro 26 au numéro 35. Dans les dernières parutions

10 Andrzej Turowski, *Existe-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est ?*, Paris 1986, 17-8.

11 Ljubomir Micić, in : *Zenit*, n° 43, n.p.

12 Micić, « Manifeste aux barbares d'esprit », 6.

13 Micić, « Manifeste aux barbares d'esprit », 8.

14 Micić, « Manifeste aux barbares d'esprit », 8.

(de 36 à 43), les sous-titres additionnels ont été supprimés. En 1924, au moment où *Zenit* change de lieu d'édition, la revue se politise en adhérant à certaines idées constructivistes, telles que l'œuvre-construction, la socialisation de l'art et l'édification d'un art collectif. Cependant, comme dans les premiers numéros où les liens avec l'expressionnisme sont les plus étroits, l'adhésion de Micić est toujours tempéré par sa curiosité pour d'autres manifestations artistiques. Par exemple, en publiant le texte-manifeste de Raoul Hausmann, « Sieg Triumph Tabak mit Bohnen »¹⁵, dans la revue, Micić associe dada même si, comme il l'indique dans une note, « l'auteur de cet article n'appartient plus aux dadaïstes, ce qu'il avoue ouvertement par sa collaboration dans *Zenit*. Même si nous ne sommes pas d'accord avec cet article, nous faisons place à un personnage qui de tout cœur souhaite être mal compris »¹⁶. Si Micić ne semble pas adhérer à dada, sa participation à la publication de *Dada-Jok* (dada-non)¹⁷ de son frère Branko Ve-Poljanski et l'adoption de certaines pratiques dadaïstes ne l'empêchent pas de soutenir dada : « A nous zénitistes appartient au prime abord d'aider Dada en lui frayant un chemin vers l'absurde »¹⁸ comme de publier le texte de Dragan Aleksić¹⁹, « Dadazaim » dans le numéro 3 de *Zenit*, en avril 1921.

A l'instar de la réception de dada au sein de la revue, le constructivisme devient un pôle d'attraction non dénué d'ambivalence. En effet, si le projet organisationnel totalisant et utopique proposé par les constructivistes fascinent une partie des avant-gardes européennes, les textes de Micić, comme le souligne Esther Levinger²⁰, ne mentionnent jamais la lutte des classes ou la dictature du prolétariat et ne présente jamais le communisme comme un idéal, mais considère l'utopie comme une fonction dont le pouvoir réside dans la poésie et l'art. Chez Micić, le projet social des constructivistes s'allie à une valorisation de l'imaginaire. Les principes qui régissent la signification des images (plastique et verbale) sont remis en cause et peuvent ainsi rejoindre les préoccupations des constructivistes

15 *Zenit, Internacionalna revija za novu umetnost* (Revue internationale pour l'art nouveau), Zagreb, 9, novembre 1921, 10-1.

16 *Zenit, Internacionalna revija za novu umetnost*, 11. La note ajoutée est écrite en allemand.

17 *Dada-jok* (dada-non ou dada-nenni) a été publié au printemps 1922 par Branko Ve-Poljanski, frère de Ljubomir Micić.

18 Micić Ljubomir, texte programmatique dans *Zenit*, Zagreb, 19/20, 1922.

19 Dragan Aleksić (1901-1958), poète et théoricien, a publié en 1922 deux revues dadaïstes d'un numéro unique chacune, *Dada-Tank* et *Dada-Jazzy*, et a été en contact avec de nombreux dadaïstes tels que Tristan Tzara, Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters, Richard Huelsenbeck et Hans Richter.

20 Esther Levinger, « Ljubomir Micić and the zenitist utopia », in : *Central European avant-gardes: exchange and transformation 1910-1930*, Timothy O. Benson (éd.), Los Angeles 2002, 260-78.

sans rompre avec l'exploration de l'imaginaire, à la source des métaphores de la représentation verbale mais aussi picturale.

Le paradoxe : un principe d'« élasticité »²¹?

Ainsi en s'appuyant sur les contradictions inhérentes aux avant-gardes, Micić tente de combler les inégalités existantes au sein de celles-ci. Son intérêt égal pour les artistes occidentaux comme pour leurs homologues de l'Est, manifeste une volonté de synthèse comme celle de sortir de sa position marginale dans son pays. Opposé aux valeurs conformistes et traditionnelles, il ouvre la revue à toutes les formes les plus radicales d'expérimentation et d'innovation artistiques. L'analyse de la production plastique reproduite (les œuvres de Jo Klek – pseudonyme de Josef Seissel –, de Mihailo S. Petrov, de Vilko Gecan, mais aussi celles de Delaunay, de Gleizes, de Teige, d'El Lissitzky, de László de Moholy-Nagy, de Rodtchenko) prouve la liberté avec laquelle la revue intègre les différentes tendances de l'avant-garde comme les textes et les poèmes dans leur version originale (français, allemand, russe, anglais). La revue reproduit des œuvres de tous les courants de l'avant-garde du moment, mêlant le matérialisme de la culture occidentale à l'idéalisme des pays de l'Est de l'Europe. L'hétérogénéité revendiquée de la revue, la dichotomie entre la théorie zénitiste de Micić, critiquée et accusée de nationalisme²², et les œuvres présentées suppose une politique éditoriale opposée à toute globalisation, n'hésitant pas à présenter le paradoxe et la contradiction comme un principe dynamique pour la revue et comme une composante avant-gardiste. Cette contribution offre la possibilité d'évaluer l'originalité d'une production artistique, qui présente les artistes yougoslaves (écrivains et plasticiens) tels que Dragan Aleksić, Jovan Bijelić, August Černigoj, Milos Crnjanski, Vinko Foretić-Vis, Vilko Gecan, Dusan Matić, Boško Tokin, Rastko Petrović, Stanislav Vinaver, Jo Klek, Mihailo S. Petrov, avec leurs homologues européens.

La typographie suit les fluctuations de la revue, les couvertures des quatre premiers numéros utilisent des caractères allemands « gothiques » que la revue *Der Sturm* utilisait avant de s'infléchir vers dada et le

21 La « notion élastique » a été « exigée » par Dragan Aleksić dans un texte intitulé « Dada » (dans *Zenit*, 3, 1921, et dans *Dada-Jazg*, 1922) pour l'homme contemporain, afin d'adopter une attitude souple et ouverte, sans carcan.

22 Les idées de Micić (son anti-rationnalisme et ce qui était perçu comme du nationalisme) ont été critiquées, par exemple, Hans Richter dans *Vesch/Gegensand/Objet* de mai 1922 ou le journal pragois *Studentska revue*, 5, février 1922.

constructivisme. Dans un second temps, une recherche sur la construction formelle basée sur les axes horizontaux et verticaux permet de mettre en valeur les textes et le jeu entre les grosseurs des imprimés, plus ou moins soutenus en gras et les encadrés des mots; le travail de Micić se concentre davantage sur le mot que sur les lettres, qui deviennent des éléments constructifs et plastiques dans la production dadaïstes et constructivistes. Le travail sur le mot, sur ses possibilités plastiques véhiculent un rythme dynamique, celui du « barbarogénie », celui des « barbares » mais aussi celui du style rapide et direct employé par Micić et par de nombreux collaborateurs, animé par des formules lapidaires et ponctué de points d'exclamation, de tirets, de borborygmes.

Dans les premiers numéros, les couvertures de la revue misent sur une clarté du titre et des sous-titres; les mots gardent leur intégrité et le titre placé en biais (par exemple dans le numéro 5), horizontalement (dans le numéro 1) ou verticalement à gauche de la page (dans le nr numéro 7 par exemple) laissent la place à la liste des collaborateurs et parfois à une illustration, *La ville* de Leopold Survage occupant la moitié de la couverture du numéro 6 ou celle de Rudolf Schlichter dans le numéro 9. Quelques couvertures, telle que celle du numéro 13 fractionne le titre et intègre la reproduction d'un dessin en noir et blanc d'Albert Gleizes de format ovale. De même, la typographie noire dans la majorité des numéros s'adjoint des lettres rouges et parfois, comme c'est le cas pour le numéro 38, la typographie rouge de l'ensemble de la couverture adopte les mêmes caractéristiques mais une autre symbolique, pour le numéro « jubilaire », indiqué par une inscription en vert barrant la couverture. Les lettres cyrilliques pour le titre, font leur apparition en 1923 et s'accompagne d'une recherche plus graphique avec des contrastes entre les espaces vides et pleins, avec un jeu sur les dimensions des lettres ou des mots, la langue des sous-titres reste le français, doublé par le serbo-croate (lettres cyrilliques). La page des textes est partagée en deux colonnes dans lesquelles peuvent s'insérer des reproductions et des poèmes-tableaux.

Pour le numéro double 17/18 consacré à l'avant-garde russe et à l'anniversaire de la révolution de 1917, Micić invite El Lissitzky et Ilya Ehrenbourg à être les rédacteurs de ce numéro spécial. El Lissitzky conçoit la couverture en utilisant les lettres comme des éléments constructifs et rythmiques. La lettre, matériau-constructeur structure la surface et affirme son autonomie vis à vis du mot. Ce numéro conçu par les deux rédacteurs de la revue *Vesch/Objet/Gegenstand* indique une réelle ouverture de *Zenit* au constructivisme et une recherche de synthèse avec les autres axes zénitistes.

La couverture du numéro 15 présente une linogravure, « Linorez », de l'activiste et directeur de la revue hongroise *Ma*, Lajos Kassák, avec un

graphisme constitué de lignes épaisses; celle du numéros 19/20 est occupé par la linogravure de Moholy-Nagy²³, des lignes noires orthogonales sont perturbées par deux demi cercles animant la surface blanche. La typographie simple et équilibrée du titre placée horizontalement met en valeur la structure du dessin constructiviste de Moholy-Nagy. A l'instar de ces couvertures, celle du numéro 11 avec la reproduction de la maquette du monument à la troisième internationale de Vladimir Tatline n'implique pas un numéro consacré entièrement au constructivisme; en effet, un tableau de George Grosz au-dessus d'un poème de Pierre Albert-Birot et un texte d'Ivan Goll, « Baromètre lyrique », un linoleum de Karel Teige représentant une vue de Paris avec la Tour Eiffel, un texte de Jean Epstein et un autre de Dragan Aleksic élargissent la problématique constructiviste à celle, plus générale, de la construction et à l'élaboration d'un nouveau langage artistique. Le choix de l'art non-objectif n'est pas exclusif, et à l'instar de dada, toutes les formes sont possibles, il s'agit de transgresser les limites « positives » de l'expérience cognitive, lesquelles semblaient être une position partagée par de nombreuses avant-gardes, suprématisme, dada, constructivisme. La liste des collaborateurs qu'Irina Subotić a publiée dans le catalogue d'exposition²⁴ montre une cohabitation des différentes tendances, futurisme, dada, expressionnisme, constructivisme, suprématisme, le Bauhaus et les représentants des avant-gardes tchèque (autour de *Devetsil*), hongroise (autour de *Ma*), polonaise (autour de *Zwrotnica*) et pose la question de savoir si ce « mélange » artistique et paradoxal ne tente pas de nier une certaine perspective historiciste voire de renouveler le concept avant-gardiste correspondant au rejet d'un attachement au passé et son corollaire, l'idéologie de l'historicité évolutive. De fait, dans ses écrits Micić se place davantage sur l'axe d'une géographie artistique plutôt que sur celui de l'historicisme. Cette approche partagée par dada rejoint celle très générale mais symptomatique d'« être au-delà de l'avant-garde » que partage de nombreux artistes, représentés et appréciés par Micić, Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy, Malevitch, ce qui nous permet de nuancer l'adhésion de la revue au constructivisme et à une certaine pratique révolutionnaire.

Au sein de la revue, existe-t-il des artistes « zénitistes » ? Pour Krisztina Passuth²⁵, on ne peut pas parler de style zénitiste, et les œuvres des artistes-membres de *Zenit* sont toutes de petit format. Cependant, les

23 Dans le n° 19/20, 1922.

24 Irina Subotić & Vida Golubovic (éds.), *Zenit i avangard dvadesetih godina*, Belgrade 1983, 78, 79.

25 Krisztina Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale 1907-1927*, Paris 1988, 172-84.

artistes « yougoslaves » présentés adoptent une attitude similaire à celle de Micić, en jouant sur le paradoxe et sur l'écart que leurs œuvres manifestent au regard des courants artistiques.

Micić consacre un texte²⁶ aux avant-gardes présentées à l'exposition internationale à Belgrade en 1924. Il est question d'une nécessaire socialisation de l'art contemporain dont les milieux de l'avant-garde russe offraient un exemple. Micić met en lumière le travail de Josif Klek/Seissel, baptisé « artiste zénitiste » qui a réalisé, dans le cadre de la revue, des dessins, des collages, des constructions, des décors, des projets d'architecture et des costumes. L'œuvre de Klek intitulé *arbos peinture*²⁷ reflétait le dynamisme et l'« énergie zénitiste » grâce aux moyens employés, des formes pures et non objectives, des couleurs vives, des espaces rythmés par les plans et les lignes. Ses projets architectoniques, par exemple *Projets pour la villa Zenit* prouvent l'adoption de l'idée de l'« œuvre-construction »²⁸, c'est à dire privilégier le problème de la construction et non celui de la forme, subordonner les caractéristiques de l'objet au matériau. Dans *Kiosque* (1923), Klek utilise une forte structure orthogonale, constituée de panneaux publicitaires où le nom des marques se superposent à la construction, la dédoublant et constituant une extension visuelle à l'architecture. Cependant, les projets architecturaux de Klek sont marqués par un esprit non utilitariste. Dans *Zeniteum I* et *Zeniteum II*, projets architecturaux dont le titre renvoie à l'architecture antique mais dont la fonctionnalité reste aléatoire et même improbable, Klek propose une architecture utopique composée de coupôles superposées et d'un vocabulaire de formes géométriques simples et monumentales qui rappellent les projets de Louis Etienne Boullé et de Claude Nicolas Ledoux, dont la visée imaginaire semble perdurée. Dans un collage intitulé *Symétrie dans l'espace* (1924)²⁹, Klek utilise des formes géométriques simples, en jeu de superposition et de transparence ainsi que le portrait de deux hommes (zénitistes ?) et deux écritures, latine et cyrillique. Ce collage zénitiste sur un fond sombre est organisé à partir d'une diagonale qui oriente sa lecture et la dynamise. Le travail de Klek s'appuie sur une économie des éléments constructifs dont l'absence d'ancrage spatial

26 « La conférence de L. Mitzitch au vernissage de l'exposition internationale de l'art nouveau à Belgrade 9 avril 1924 », in : *Zenit*, n° 34, 4-6; et n° 35, 5-6.

27 C'est l'abréviation de « (*h*)artija » (papier), « *boja* » (couleur), et « *slika* » (image). Micić les intitule aussi *pafama* (papierfarbenmalerei, c'est-à-dire papier-couleur-peinture), in : Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale*, 180.

28 Comme l'a montré Andrzej Turowski, *Existe-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est ?*, 78.

29 Collage, 21,1 x 17 cm, Narodni Muzej, Belgrade.

produit une composition dynamique, par exemple *Nevero moja* (1924)³⁰ où les triangles rouges, les cœurs rouges et blancs, les chiffres noirs et les mots noirs sur des bandes blanches sont dispersés sur le fond noir et uniforme.

Dans le numéro 5 de *Zenit*, Micić fait une place à Mihailo S. Petrov dont les expérimentations le mènent de l'expressionnisme au constructivisme. Les dessins et les linogravures de Petrov ont été reproduits dans de nombreux numéros de la revue³¹. *Linoleum* (1921), pour *Zenit* numéro 9, est une illustration abstraite basée sur des contrastes de noir et blanc, sur les rythmes des lignes. Micić, malgré sa brouille avec Petrov, lui confia l'affiche de la première exposition Zenit d'art international. Ayant assimilé la pratique constructivisme, Petrov utilise la technique du collage en superposant les plans, en intégrant une page du catalogue et mêle des mots aux formes géométriques pour organiser l'espace. Parallèlement, Petrov participe à l'activité dada de Zagreb en publiant un poème et deux gravures pour *Dada-Tank*, la revue de Dragan Aleksić et une gravure pour la revue activiste hongroise *út*, proche de la revue de Kassák *Ma*. L'œuvre de Petrov prouve une corrélation entre dada et le constructivisme dans le dépassement de tout principe illustratif.

Zenit a choisi une approche paradoxale de l'avant-garde, de rapprocher des tendances contraires. Si le constructivisme est largement représenté à partir de 1922, la position anti-rationaliste de Micić persiste ainsi que son refus de relier l'art aux productions industrielles. Ainsi *Zenit* rend les frontières aussi bien géographiques qu'artistiques perméables, et montre les expérimentations et la transformation du langage artistique comme les traits communs de l'avant-garde, sans règle fixe. L'internationalisme artistique n'exclut pas l'hétérogénéité de la production et possède l'« élasticité » suffisante pour intégrer les revendications identitaires.

L'internationalisme des avant-gardes : position politique ou rhizome artistique ?

Au delà du barbarisme, l'internationalisme est revendiqué non seulement dans le sous-titre de la revue mais aussi dans une volonté de rassembler des collaborateurs de différents pays dont les textes publiés dans leur langue originale cohabitent avec des traductions en serbo-croates de

30 Collage, 11 x 7,5 cm, Narodni Muzej, Belgrade.

31 Dans les numéros 6, 8, 9, 10, 12 et 13 et ses poèmes dans les numéros 6 et 11.

poèmes³² ou de textes. Le choix de certains collaborateurs a positionné la revue sur la scène internationale. Ivan Goll a non seulement écrit des textes pour la revue, signé le manifeste mais il a également procuré de nombreux manuscrits à Micić, ceux de Pierre Albert-Birot, Paul Dermée, Jean Epstein, Vicente Huidobro, Max Jacob, André Salmon, Michel Seuphor et surtout joué un rôle d'intermédiaire et de passeur au sein de l'avant-garde européenne (allemande, russe, hongroise, tchécoslovaque, yougoslave, ...) comme en témoigne Zdenek Kalista :

Une grande partie de ce que Karel Teige introduisit à l'époque dans le circuit de notre vie littéraire, voire artistique, lui venait de Goll [...]. Il envoyait ses livres à Prague et ceux de jeunes auteurs français et allemands sur qui il voulait attirer l'attention, il y expédiait des revues des journaux et des tracts [...]. [Il] recherchait des adresses que ses amis de Prague pouvaient contacter, il prodiguait des conseils et montrait quelques voies nouvelles pour les traductions qui étaient effectués chez nous.³³

Dans une lettre à Kalista, Goll montre son attachement à l'indépendance des groupes nationaux dans l'édification d'une Europe nouvelle :

Depuis quelque temps déjà, une tempête ardente souffle sur vos pays. Partout, mes jeunes barbares, vos collines sont en flammes. En Hongrie, en Yougoslavie, en Croatie aussi on entend les rythmes d'une génération en marche. Bravo. Car l'Europe pourrie a besoin de sang bouillonnant. Vous le lui apporterez si vous restez vous mêmes, si vous chantez votre destin et votre douleur de liberté. [...] Ce n'est pas le nom de zénitisme qui importe, mais notre nouveau sentiment, votre conception du monde ... votre littérature doit devenir mondiale. Mais surtout : soyez-vous mêmes et restez vous mêmes ! Apprenez du futurisme, du cubisme et des formes qui actuellement tendent vers la simplicité, vers une simplicité qui doit délecter *l'homme simple*, l'ouvrier davantage que le snob littéraire.³⁴

L'insistance de Goll pour préserver les spécificités des mouvements d'avant-gardes est partagée par de nombreux artistes afin de lutter contre une culture uniforme et contre ce qu'ils nommaient un « quelconque

32 Irina Subotić souligne que les poèmes de Maïakovski ont été traduits pour la première fois en serbo-croate dans la revue *Zenit*, dans « La revue *Zenit* et ses promoteurs », in : *Ligeia*, 5/6, avril/septembre 1989, 107-15, ici 108.

33 Zdenek Kalista, « Au sujet des relations d'Yvan Goll avec l'avant-garde littéraire tchèque après la première guerre mondiale. Souvenirs et documents » (trad. du tchèque), in : *Literary Archiv*, 2, Prague 1976 (*Jahrbuch des Museums des tschechischen Schrifttums*), 119-20 ; cité par Barbara Glauert-Hesse dans « Je n'appartiens qu'à l'Europe », in : *Europe*, 899, mars 2004, 114-51, ici 125.

34 Lettre de Goll à Kalista, s.d, reproduite dans Kalista, « Au sujet des relations d'Yvan Goll », 127 et dans Glauert-Hesse, « Je n'appartiens qu'à l'Europe », 127.

cosmopolitisme artistique »³⁵. Les contacts avec les cercles français se font par l'intermédiaire de Ivan Goll qui marque les premiers numéros de la revue. Sa collaboration à la rédaction commence en 1921, dans le numéro 8, et se poursuit jusqu'au numéro 13 publié l'année suivante. Dans les revues *Lumière* (n° 2, Anvers, octobre 1921) et *Manomètre* (n° 3, Lyon, 1922), Goll traduit des poèmes de Ljubomir Micić et fait connaître le zénitisme en France. D'autres revues telles que *Promenoir*, *Transformation*, *L'Esprit nouveau* font également paraître des œuvres zénitistes.

Les revues, supports indispensables à la diffusion des idéologies avant-gardistes, sont des centres pour les échanges d'information, et se font mutuellement de la publicité, par exemple *Ma*, *Devetsil*, *út*, *75HP* présentent *Zenit*. De même, la revue yougoslave publie des textes et des œuvres des artistes de ces revues³⁶. Par une forme similaire de la typographie, les revues démontrent une relation esthétique et leur communauté d'esprit tout en maintenant des discours sur leur spécificité.

Parallèlement, les grandes expositions internationales présentent et confrontent les avant-gardes du moment. *Zenit* organise la première Exposition Internationale d'Art Nouveau à Belgrade du 9 au 19 avril 1924. A cette occasion, Micić consacre le numéro 25 de *Zenit* à l'exposition; faisant office de catalogue, la revue énumère les artistes de onze pays³⁷ et les tendances : « zénitisme, expressionnisme, futurisme, cubisme, constructivisme, purisme ». La presse mentionna peu l'exposition³⁸ mais, à cette occasion, Micić écrivit un article³⁹ pour préciser ses idées sur l'art collectif et la socialisation de l'art, se rapprochant ainsi des thèses constructivistes et celle de l'*œuvre-construction*. La même année, du 30 novembre au 20 décembre 1924, la revue roumaine *Contimporanul* organisa une exposition internationale de l'art contemporain, une des premières manifestations publiques des différentes tendances de l'avant-garde à Bucarest à laquelle *Zenit* participa par l'entremise des œuvres de Klek. De même, comme l'indique Irina Subotić⁴⁰, *Zenit* aurait participé à deux autres expositions, en effet le catalogue de l'exposition « Internationale Ausstel-

35 Kalista, « Au sujet des relations d'Yvan Goll », 131.

36 Le cercle de *Devetsil* dans le n° 7 de *Zenit*, le cercle de *Ma* dans *Zenit* n° 15 ou n° 19.

37 Allemagne, Belgique, Bulgarie, Danemark, Etats-Unis, France, Hongrie, Italie, Pays-Bas, Russie et Yougoslavie.

38 Irina Subotić, « Les artistes yougoslaves et la France (1920-1930) » (in : *Un art sans frontières*, Paris 1994, 17-31) mentionne deux articles dans *Pokret*, « Zenitova izložba nove umetnosti » de D. Timotijević, le 19 avril 1924, n° 12, 197 et dans *Prager Press*, « Theater und Kunst. Die erste internationale Ausstellung neuer Kunst in Belgrad » de Pavel Lajarić, le 5 mai 1924, 31.

39 Dans le n° 25 de *Zenit*.

40 Subotić, « La revue *Zenit* et ses promoteurs », 109-14.

lung Jünger Kunst » organisée au Städtliches Museum de Bielefeld mentionnent des artistes ayant exposé à Belgrade ainsi que l'artiste zénitiste Klek. L'exposition « Art révolutionnaire d'Occident », qui a eu lieu à Moscou au mois de mars 1926, comportait plusieurs numéros de *Zenit*, et des œuvres reproduites (des affiches, des dessins, des livres) de trois artistes zénitistes Micić, Poljanski et Marijan Mikac⁴¹.

Lors d'un séjour à Berlin, Micić et Poljanski prennent contact avec El Lissitzky, Ilya Ehrenbourg et sa femme la peintre Kosinzova mais aussi Wassily Kandinsky avec lequel Micić partage l'idée que l'abstraction et la spiritualité se placent sur le même plan. *Zenit*⁴² est publié en allemand dans un numéro de 1922 et diffuse les idées zénitistes dans les cercles de l'avant-garde européenne. En outre, *Der Sturm* ouvre ses pages aux artistes de l'Europe de l'Est et publie dans le numéro 4 de 1924, « No made in Serbia » de Micić et permet ainsi au poète serbe d'avoir une portée internationale. Micić rend visite à Herwarth Walden pendant l'été 1922 et le met en contact avec l'avant-garde de l'Europe de l'Est et en particulier l'art russe via Berlin. Le représentant de la revue, Virgil (Branko) Poljanski qui séjournait à Berlin, fut impressionné par l'exposition d'art russe à la galerie Van Diemen, à laquelle il consacra un article⁴³. Il analyse les formes de Malevitch, « le grand créateur du suprématisme », ayant abandonné la réalité subjective pour atteindre la sensation pure, et projette ces idées visionnaires sur les constructions utilitaires d'El Lissitzky. De plus, le terme de « supremasculpture » définit l'œuvre de Tatline et Rodtchenko, montrant que Poljanski considère Malevitch comme l'artiste russe le plus représentatif tout en revendiquant un art autonome et anti-rationaliste, partagé par Micić.

« *Avant-garde* exprime déjà l'idée d'une Internationale de l'esprit. Cette Internationale ne connaît pas d'autre règlement que le désir instinctif de donner à la vie une expression idéale et réaliste et d'interpréter dans l'art la vie d'une manière pure et esthétique. C'est une troupe sans ordre, dispersée dans toutes les nations »⁴⁴. L'analyse de van Doesburg souligne ce qu'une revue comme *Zenit* a pu diffuser, à partir des échanges, malgré des particularismes affichés et certains malentendus dans la réception, une union implicite pour regrouper les artistes dont la lutte est de libérer l'art de ses codes de la représentation et de développer une révolution esthétique.

41 Subotić, « La revue *Zenit* et ses promoteurs », 111.

42 Le n° 16 de *Zenit* dont le sous-titre est « *International Zeitschrift für Neue Kunst* ».

43 « Kroz rusku izozbu u Berlinu », in : *Zenit*, 22, Zagreb 1923, 4-5.

44 Theo van Doesburg, « Revue der Avant-garde », in : *Het Getij*, 6, 1921, cité d'après Hubert van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus. Dada in Zürich und Berlin*, Heidelberg 1999, 46-7.

tique qui abolit la distinction entre l'art et la vie. Le but de cet internationalisme est celui qui avait été déclaré au Congrès de Düsseldorf en 1922 : « Artistes de tous les pays, unissez-vous », prise de position politique de l'art de s'intégrer dans la vie et une prise de conscience collective d'aller dans la même direction. Accusé de faire de la propagande communiste⁴⁵, Zenit fut interdit en 1926 et Micić se réfugia à Paris, « sans espoir de retour, parce que la Serbie était une fois martyre, mais aujourd'hui, comme les autres LA SERBIE MARTYRISE »⁴⁶.

Centre de l'échange et de la diffusion, la revue *Zenit* participe à ce rhizome où se mêle le matérialisme de la culture occidentale à l'idéalisme des pays de l'Est de l'Europe et soumet l'historiographie à une réévaluation des frontières entre les différentes tendances de l'avant-garde dont la perméabilité des idées et des pratiques rompt avec les hiérarchies entre centres et périphéries artistiques et géographiques.

45 A cause d'un article signé Dr M. Rasinov (peut-être un pseudonyme de Micić, voir Subotić, « La revue *Zenit* et ses promoteurs », 107), « Le Zénitisme est fils du marxisme », dans le n° 43 de *Zenit*, Micić s'enfuit en France, via l'Italie où Marinetti lui viendra en aide.

46 Dans le supplément du n° 43, *Zenit en émigration*, Micić explique que ce n° est le dernier qui paraît à Belgrade et « qui fut interdit en serbie ». Micić est accusé par une loi très grave parce que le régime sauvage trouve qu'avec le zénitisme « on fait appel aux citoyens pour faire la révolution d'après le modèle de la révolution russe en faisant de la propagande du communisme ».

Europa : une manifestation des avant-gardes européennes

Liliane Meffre (Université de Bourgogne)

Quelques années seulement après la terrible cassure que la Grande Guerre avait provoquée en Europe dans les relations entre les peuples et aussi dans les esprits qui avaient vu se dévoyer le progrès technique au profit du mal absolu, paraît, édité par deux Allemands connus pour leur francophilie et leur esprit d'ouverture, un almanach intitulé *Europa* chez Gustav Kiepenheuer à Potsdam. Certes, en 1925 le concept d'« Etats Unis d'Europe » commence à faire florès dans une certaine presse, mais sans contours précis. Or, voici que deux spécialistes de l'art, éditeurs et contributeurs de multiples revues, fréquentant les milieux les plus avancés dans de nombreux pays font appel à leurs connaissances et leurs relations pour proposer un état des lieux des productions de l'esprit dans une Europe qu'ils conçoivent manifestement allant de « l'Atlantique à l'Oural » !

Qui sont ces deux éditeurs, Carl Einstein et Paul Westheim ? Carl Einstein est depuis le début du XX^e siècle un hôte assidu de la capitale française où il compte de nombreux amis, où il fréquente tous les mouvements d'avant-garde existants et où il s'est hâté de retourner une fois la guerre terminée comme le rappelle André Salmon dans ses souvenirs : Einstein « fut le premier Allemand de Paris qui revint parmi nous, à Montparnasse, après la guerre. On peut croire que Giraudoux l'apprit assez vite. Toujours est-il que Giraudoux me pria de l'aider dans l'organisation d'un déjeuner à offrir à cet intellectuel allemand plus prompt qu'aucun autre à repasser le Rhin pour le plaisir de notre société »¹. Il a effectivement renoué tous les liens possibles et cherché à échapper au confinement dont souffraient alors les intellectuels en Allemagne. Comme il l'écrit au Dr Allendy qui l'invite en 1923-1924 à prononcer une conférence à Paris devant son « Groupe d'études philosophiques et scientifiques pour l'examen des tendances nouvelles » (dont nous reparlerons) : « les intellectuels allemands crèvent, gravement

¹ André Salmon, *Souvenirs sans fin*, Paris 1956, Vol. 2 (1908-1920), 172.

blessés et tués par la misère et un blocus psychique que vous avez rompu »². Carl Einstein de son côté incite ses amis parisiens à venir à Berlin, leur propose de les guider. Il sollicite pour la réalisation de l'almanach son propre réseau de relations, comme l'atteste sa correspondance avec Kahnweiler, avec Kisling, Gris, Tzara et d'autres encore. Plusieurs lettres échangées avec Klee montrent combien il a à cœur d'insister pour obtenir leur participation auprès de ceux qui lui paraissent incarner la modernité, l'avant-garde dans un certain domaine. Einstein écrit à cette époque dans deux revues allemandes fameuses *Der Querschnitt* et *Das Kunstblatt*. La première est celle du marchand d'art Alfred Flechtheim, en relation d'affaires avec Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, très orientée vers Paris où elle compte nombre de collaborateurs, et la seconde est celle de Paul Westheim, d'une plus haute exigence intellectuelle, parfaitement à l'écoute de la vie artistique française, éditée chez Kiepenheuer. De plus, Westheim dirige la collection *Orbis Pictus* aux éditions Wasmuth et a rédigé de remarquables monographies d'artistes, celle sur Kokoschka sort justement en 1925. Ensemble, Einstein et Westheim avaient publié un ouvrage sur le sculpteur Rudolf Belling, membre de la « Novembergruppe », chez Kiepenheuer en 1924. Deux hommes donc à l'expérience éditoriale solide, aux convictions politiques progressistes affirmées, qui vont dans les 282 pages de cet almanach *Europa* réunir 150 contributions littéraires et plus de 100 reproductions d'œuvres d'art (dessins, aquarelles, tableaux) sans oublier croquis et photographies concernant l'architecture, la mode, mais toujours en noir et blanc. Seule la couverture réalisée par le peintre cubiste parisien Fernand Léger est en couleurs. Difficile à expliquer, si ce n'est par un contexte économique contraignant, que ces spécialistes aient renoncé aux reproductions en couleurs de grande qualité qui caractérisaient leurs autres ouvrages sur l'art.

Si leur sympathie pour la création d'une Europe des arts, des lettres et des esprits qu'ils pratiquaient eux-mêmes d'ailleurs depuis longtemps et qu'ils proposent de façon éblouissante dans sa diversité et sa richesse au fil des pages de l'almanach est claire et évidente, il n'en demeure pas moins que leur humour, ou disons peut-être déjà leurs pressentiments, se manifestent d'entrée de jeu et concluent la pourtant brillante distribution. C'est, en effet, un texte de Hermann Kasack (avec un dessin de Ensor) intitulé

² Lettre envoyée de Sittignano, Italie, où résida Carl Einstein en 1923-24 avec la photographe Florence Henri. Publiée pour la première fois avec le texte inédit de la conférence de Carl Einstein « Abrégé d'une esthétique », grâce à l'aimable autorisation de Françoise Champin, par Liliane Meffre dans *La Part de l'œil, Esthétique et phénoménologie en mutation*, Bruxelles 2006-2007, n° 21-22, 265-79.

« Jahrmarkt Europa » (La foire Europe) qui ouvre le volume de façon plutôt grinçante et c'est la composition d'un fou, « Europa gezeichnet von einem Irren », comportant des objets bizarres, des noms de pays « France, Prusse, Russie... » qui termine, tel un sceau refermant un vieux grimoire, cet hymne aux avant-gardes européennes. Distanciation à la Brecht déjà ? Bertolt Brecht est effectivement représenté par un poème « Ballade von der Freundschaft » (Ballade de l'amitié) illustrée d'un relief en bois de Ernst Barlach « Die gemarterte Menschheit » (L'humanité martyrisée) auquel fait pendant une gravure de Gerhard Marcks représentant l'animal lui aussi martyrisé, deux contrepoints donc au thème de la ballade brechtienne! « Die goldenen Zwanziger », « les années folles » en français, n'ont pas été dorées pour tous dans cette Allemagne des années 1920 qui voit la montée rapide de l'antisémitisme – rappelons le procès pour blasphème intenté à Carl Einstein pour sa pièce *Die schlimme Botschaft* (La mauvaise nouvelle) en 1922. En 1928, Carl Einstein va s'établir en France car il ne peut plus travailler en paix en Allemagne comme il l'écrit de façon récurrente à Kahnweiler et à Kisling ; en 1933, c'est Paul Westheim qui est contraint à l'exil, en France puis au Mexique.

Pratiquement tous les pays d'Europe sont représentés dans l'almanach. En priorité l'Allemagne et la France – d'ailleurs leurs deux langues sont utilisées dans la publication, à la colère de certains nationalistes allemands comme le montrent des comptes rendus de l'époque –, ensuite la Belgique, la Russie, la Hollande, l'Italie, les pays d'Europe centrale : Autriche, Bulgarie, Roumanie, Hongrie ... avec leur enchevêtrement de nationalités, la Suisse puis l'Espagne. Même l'Angleterre est présente grâce à l'Américain Ezra Pound écrivant une « Lettre anglaise » qui cite plusieurs auteurs anglais dont bien sûr W.B. Yeats, mais surtout qui évoque le vorticisme et l'œuvre du jeune sculpteur français, tombé au cours de la guerre, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, cofondateur avec Pound de cette avant-garde de brève durée. À noter toutefois, et c'est révélateur de l'état d'esprit européen des éditeurs de l'almanach, que la nationalité des auteurs, intellectuels, artistes, n'est jamais expressément mentionnée. D'autant – faut-il le rappeler – que nombreux étaient, notamment à Paris, des émigrés³, en provenance d'Europe centrale, en passe de devenir français comme les Kisling, Csaky, Puni (Pouigny), et autres créateurs.

Le programme de l'almanach sur la page de garde, dans une typographie accrocheuse, est ambitieux : peinture, littérature, musique, archi-

³ Sur ce thème se rapporter à l'ouvrage *Carl Einstein et Benjamin Fondane. Avant-gardes et émigration dans le Paris des années 1920-1930*, sous la direction de Liliane Meffre et Olivier Salazar-Ferrer, Bruxelles 2008.

tecture, arts plastiques, théâtre, film, mode, sans oublier – pointe d’humour – « quelques remarques en marge non sans importance » comme bien sûr le lecteur le remarquera!

En feuilletant le volume on constate que le pari est tenu, et de façon magistrale. Tous ceux qui avaient un nom dans l’Europa de l’époque sont représentés, interviewés, reproduits ; d’autres émergent et sont porteurs de cette effervescence avant-gardiste qui les distingue du lot commun. Nous n’allons certes pas donner une liste exhaustive des participants – ce serait lassant pour le lecteur – mais mettre en relief ce qui fait la valeur unique de cette internationale de la subversion esthétique, de cet instantané des arts et des lettres dans le foisonnement de la contemporanéité. Naturellement les auteurs et artistes allemands que Einstein et Westheim appréciaient déjà sont présents tels Georg Kaiser, Hermann Kasack (homme de lettres et de radio, lecteur chez Kiepenheuer), George Grosz, le partenaire de Carl Einstein pour l’édition de *Der blutige Ernst*, revue satirique éditée à Berlin en 1919 et plusieurs fois saisie, Oskar Schlemmer, le créateur de « Das triadische Ballett » représentatif du Bauhaus alors établi à Dessau, Kokoschka, quelques reproductions des rares expressionnistes appréciés par Einstein tels Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Franz Marc, des poèmes de Else Lasker-Schüler ... Du côté français la place est largement faite aux admirations littéraires de Carl Einstein : André Gide (auquel est dédié *Bebuquin*), Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Valéry, mais aussi Jean Cocteau, Joseph Delteil, Reverdy, Jean Paulhan, Jacques Baron, Roger Viltrac ... En peinture, la parole est donnée à l’avant-garde par excellence selon Einstein, c’est-à-dire aux cubistes Fernand Léger et Juan Gris ; quant à Pablo Picasso et Georges Braque, ils sont reproduits, sans commentaire de leur part. Léger⁴, qui venait de publier dans *Das Kunstblatt* (1923) un article dédié à Einstein « Kurzgefasste Auseinandersetzung über das heutige künstlerische Sein » (Brève discussion sur l’être artistique actuel) donne un texte programmatique, dense et bref, « Sehr aktuell sein » illustré de deux dessins ainsi qu’un texte d’une douzaine de pages « Conférence über die Schau-Bühne », dédié cette fois à Rolf de Maré, le directeur des ballets suédois qui mit en scène une « idée de Carl Einstein » sous forme de danse nègre par Jan Börlin. Or cette conférence, « Le spectacle », avait été prononcée en français le 1^{er} juin 1924 à la Sorbonne devant les auditeurs du Groupe du Dr. Allendy puis publiée dans *Le Bulletin de l’Effort Moderne*

⁴ Sur les rapports Léger-Einstein voir notre ouvrage *Carl Einstein et la problématique des avant-gardes dans les arts plastiques*, Bruxelles 1989, ainsi que notre article « Léger, l’Allemagne et les Allemands entre les deux guerres », in : *Catalogue de l’exposition Fernand Léger* (Centre Pompidou), Paris 1997.

et traitait évidemment des arts du spectacle, des décors de théâtre dans lesquels Léger s'investissait alors fortement (citons *Skating Rink*, *La création du monde*). Il soulignait l'importance d'un thème majeur de la modernité, celui du rôle de l'image et de sa perception, mais aussi la mise en espace des œuvres, la création de la « Raumbühne » (l'espace scénique) pour reprendre l'expression de Friedrich Kiesler, que Léger avait d'ailleurs rencontré à Vienne. Einstein aurait voulu de la même façon reproduire la conférence donnée par Gris à la Sorbonne le 15 mai 1924 devant ce même groupe du Dr Allendy comme il en exprimait l'intention dans une lettre à Kahnweiler en juillet 1924, mais il ne l'a manifestement pas pu. À la place est reproduite sous le titre « Antwort », dans une traduction de Walter Mehring accompagnée d'un portrait et d'une illustration de Gris, la réponse circonstanciée donnée par le peintre à une enquête sur le cubisme, avec ces réflexions bien connues « le cubisme n'est pas une manière mais une esthétique et même un état d'âme », texte paru dans le *Bulletin de la vie artistique*, Paris, 1^{er} janvier 1925.

Les questions esthétiques sont également abordées par les futuristes italiens sous la plume de Severini, avec reproductions de Carrà, de Chirico, et aussi, largement, par les Russes Malevitch et El Lissitzky, avec reproductions de ces artistes, de Tatlin, Chagall ... Sans oublier des poèmes d'Alexander Block. El Lissitzky, par exemple, consacre un long article, illustré de photos scientifiques et de croquis, à la vision (*das Sehen*) qu'il qualifie d'art, rejoignant les préoccupations majeures de Carl Einstein en la matière. Il met en évidence la variabilité de la capacité humaine à saisir, à percevoir l'espace, enrichit sa démonstration d'exemples précis.

Les relations de Carl Einstein avec la Russie étaient, il faut y insister, intenses et multiples tant sur le plan familial qu'intellectuel. Sa femme Maria Ramm était Russe, sœur de l'épouse de Pfemfert⁵, l'éditeur de *Die Aktion*, traductrice d'auteurs russes en allemand et très liée à la colonie russe présente à Berlin. Einstein quant à lui fréquentait Majakowski, Gorki, le peintre Nathan Altmann, eut même une liaison avec Elsa Triolet. La pièce de théâtre de Carl Einstein *Die schlimme Botschaft* avait été traduite en russe et devait être mise en scène par Meyerhold comme il ressort de leur correspondance des années 1920 et également du manuscrit de E. Lundberg qui se fait lui aussi l'écho des liens multiples de Carl Einstein avec le monde russe. En 1927 sort d'ailleurs son livre sur Leon Bakst. Son enthousiasme pour les avant-gardes et pour la révolution russes est connu de tous. Un article de lui, « Absolute Kunst und absolute Politik », devait

⁵ Voir l'évocation du milieu autour de *Die Aktion* dans notre ouvrage *Carl Einstein (1880-1940). Itinéraires d'une pensée moderne*, Paris 2002, 49-59.

figurer dans l'encyclopédie soviétique. Ce qu'il faut évidemment souligner, c'est la conception large mais uniquement culturelle de l'Europe qui se dessine dans l'almanach. La Russie était alors soviétique et il n'était pas question d'un rapprochement politique quelconque.

Il est surprenant que cet almanach *Europa* n'ait pas davantage retenu l'attention ni fait jusqu'à présent l'objet d'analyses⁶ plus approfondies bien qu'il constitue un panorama d'une exceptionnelle ampleur des avant-gardes européennes qui s'y manifestent quasiment toutes par l'écrit ou l'image. Carl Einstein, le « Weltbürger »⁷, se révèle dans cette entreprise Européen convaincu et constructif, conscient comme il l'écrit au Dr Allendy « que la science n'existe pas sans une internationalité » et qu'il faut tout faire pour que « l'esprit européen » ne soit pas « tué par des provincialismes ataviques ». Il le restera jusqu'au bout, allant défendre la liberté de l'Europe en Espagne en 1936 puis refusant même en 1940 l'idée de quitter cette Europe en flammes pour une destination qui lui aurait peut-être sauvé la vie.

Nous voudrions encore mettre en valeur quelques autres composantes essentielles et originales de cette publication, en particulier la place considérable octroyée à l'architecture moderne et à ses différents courants. De grands architectes et urbanistes s'expriment par la parole ou les projets reproduits. Par exemple pour la Hollande, c'est J.J.P. Oud, membre fondateur de De Stijl, qui livre ses pensées sur divers aspects de l'architecture moderne (technique, formes, matériaux, style...) dans « Ja und nein : Bekenntnisse eines Architekten » (Oui et non : confessions d'un architecte). Le Corbusier, pénétré de la nécessité impérieuse d'un « tournant dans l'architecture », appelle de ses vœux une architecture de l'exactitude au service de la société nouvelle et projette dans des dessins suggestifs sa vision des villes du futur. Le mouvement « Neues Bauen » est lui aussi fortement représenté par l'un de ses fondateurs Hugo Häring, théoricien et architecte, auteur du projet du « Gut Garkau », un domaine réalisé à Scharbeutz dans le Ostholstein entre 1924 et 1926 précisément, dans le droit fil de cette architecture organique. Un de ses collègues, Arthur Korn, architecte-urbaniste, secrétaire du « Groupe Novembre » depuis 1922, présente un projet pour un centre d'affaires à Haïfa, s'inscrivant dans les préoccupations nouvelles pour le cadre de vie et son influence sur la société. Tout comme Amédée Ozenfant qui, dans une

⁶ Nous l'avions déjà présenté avec reproduction de la couverture, dans une contribution intitulée « La médiation culturelle entre la France et l'Allemagne de 1900 à 1940 », in : *Encyclopaedia Universalis, Symposium, Les Enjeux*, Paris 1990, 198-208.

⁷ Voir notre communication « Carl Einstein. Un citoyen du monde dans les Pyrénées », in : *Pyrénées 1940. Ultime frontière pour C. Einstein*, W. Benjamin, W. Friedmann, Paris 2006, 14-26.

contribution de dix pages, analyse les rapports entre l'art, la science et la société de demain (« Kunst, Wissenschaft und die Gesellschaft von morgen »), soulevant la question de la mécanisation de la civilisation ainsi que des enjeux liés à la transformation technologique de la société contemporaine. Dans cette société justement, la mode, mise en espace du corps, s'intègre et se développe d'une façon inattendue. Hommage est rendu aux robes simultanées de Sonia Delaunay-Terk par deux poètes contemporains, Blaise Cendrars et Joseph Delteil, qui commente longuement un défilé au Claridge. Frappent l'insistance sur les éléments nouveaux, les formes, les couleurs, la source scientifique de ces « contrastes simultanés » dus au physicien Eugène Chevreul. Rappelons le succès de la boutique « Simultané » créée par l'architecte Gabriel Guévrekian pour présenter les tissus de Sonia Delaunay au Salon d'automne de 1924 et la présence autour du pavillon de L'esprit nouveau de Le Corbusier de ces mêmes créateurs, au Salon des arts décoratifs de 1925 à Paris.

La musique prend elle aussi une place de choix avec des textes de Erik Satie, de Rudolf Réti, de Oskar Loerke, mais surtout par la partition inédite du peintre-musicien Lionel Feininger, la « Fugue VI » pour orgue ou piano à trois mains, composée à Weimar en 1922, apport original intégré dans l'almanach. Le côté technique n'est pas absent non plus : un article de Max Möckel décrypte le secret des anciens luthiers italiens.

Cette prise en compte de toutes les tendances nouvelles de la société européenne en poésie, écriture, peinture, architecture, mode, musique fait pendant à cette extraordinaire création à Paris, à la Sorbonne, en 1922 par le Docteur René Allendy, introducteur de la psychanalyse en France, analyste de plusieurs artistes et écrivains, très lié aux avant-gardes et aux milieux de l'art, du « Groupe d'études philosophiques et scientifiques pour l'examen des tendances nouvelles ». Ce groupe va inviter jusqu'en 1935 les esprits les plus novateurs dans tous les domaines, sciences, théâtre, arts ... et venant de l'ensemble de l'Europe. Récemment nous avons pu découvrir, grâce à des documents inédits, toute l'ampleur de la participation de Carl Einstein à cette entreprise sans pareille, l'enrichissement apporté par ces contacts inattendus et multiples, mais également l'importance pour Carl Einstein des idées de René Allendy, ce qui n'avait jamais encore été mis en évidence. Dans son texte écrit pour *Europa* sous le titre « Neue Gedanken in Universitätskreisen » (Pensées nouvelles dans les cercles universitaires) Allendy évoque les objectifs de son groupe : rapprocher les scientifiques et les artistes, abolir les frontières entre les différents champs du savoir pour créer une synthèse harmonieuse du savoir humain, s'adresser à des publics variés, éveiller la curiosité et la foi en l'avenir de l'homme. Un très beau projet qui par ses implications européennes a donné lieu à des réalisations fécondes. L'article d'Allendy

est illustré par le tableau de Georges Braque *Canéphore II* (1922-1923), tableau du peintre préféré de Carl Einstein. Or, ce dernier fait paraître en 1934 un livre, annoncé depuis longtemps, consacré à Braque, mais qui n'était « naturellement pas un livre sur Braque »⁸ prenant largement en compte les théories psychanalytiques et sociologiques de René Allendy, initiant ainsi un ton nouveau dont on retrouve les échos dans le manuscrit inachevé *Die Fabrikation der Fiktionen*. Le tableau de Braque illustrait également, avec celui de Gris *La Nonne*, la puissante défense du cubisme publiée par Einstein en 1923 dans la revue de Westheim *Das Kunstblatt* n° 7 sous le titre « Gerettete Malerei, enttäuschte Pompiers »⁹ (La peinture est sauvée, les pompiers sont déçus), article qui fut traduit et publié la même année dans la revue d'avant-garde lettonne *Laikmets* (L'époque). Cette revue¹⁰, inspirée par d'autres revues d'avant-garde européennes, était conçue par le sculpteur Karlis Zale en collaboration avec Arnolds Dzirkals, et sortait à Berlin. Elle ne connut que quatre livraisons. Il est intéressant de souligner que le texte en letton reprend des expressions en français et en allemand, preuve supplémentaire du multilinguisme réel en Europe dans ces années-là, preuve supplémentaire également des liens vivants entre toutes les avant-gardes du moment, par-dessus les frontières.

Il resterait de multiples aspects à analyser en détails dans cet almanach *Europa* qui resta un numéro unique malgré les efforts des deux éditeurs et les demandes pressantes qui leur parvenaient. Tour de force que de présenter à l'état natif en quelque sorte ces avant-gardes du moment, dans un incomparable foisonnement de faisceaux de relations, par touches légères, par clins d'œil ironiques ou par documents solides et élaborés. Sous sa forme éclatée, polymorphe et polysémique, audacieuse et provocante dans ses mises en rapport improbables entre divers acteurs des avant-gardes, entre divers registres, entre texte et image, *Europa* nous paraît avoir servi de référence implicite à l'aventure de *Documents* initiée quelques années plus tard en 1929-1930 à Paris par Carl Einstein, en collaboration avec Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, Georges Wildenstein et Georges-Henri Rivière.

⁸ Lettre de 1932 à Ewald Wasmuth, archives de Marbach.

⁹ Article traduit en français par L. Meffre, in : « Aspects de la théorie de l'art de Carl Einstein », *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, 1, 1979, 9-40.

¹⁰ Un grand merci à Irena Buzinska, Riga, de nous avoir signalé cette revue.

L'avant-garde bulgare de l'entre-deux-guerres comme exemple de l'« autre Europe »

Svetlana Ilieva (Centre d'étude de l'Europe médiane – INALCO)

L'« autre » désigne le différent, le distinct. Quelle est cette « autre » Europe ? Pouvons-nous définir comme telle l'Europe de l'Est, l'Europe centrale, ou les Balkans ? Et pouvons-nous, comme certains critiques le font, parler des Slaves du Sud ? Il est difficile de faire une carte commune de cette « autre » Europe, car il s'agit de plusieurs pays qui tous dirigent leur regard vers les grandes capitales européennes, mais dont le développement dans les domaines de l'art et de la littérature est très différent.

Nous prendrons comme exemple de cette « autre Europe » le cas de la Bulgarie dans la période de l'entre-deux-guerres. L'art et la littérature bulgares sont demeurés longtemps inconnus. D'une part, les chercheurs étrangers n'avaient pas de libre accès aux sources et aux archives (sans compter la barrière linguistique). D'autre part, les chercheurs bulgares mêmes n'ont commencé à s'intéresser à l'entre-deux-guerres qu'après la chute du mur de Berlin.

Certes, il existe quelques bons ouvrages sur le développement de l'avant-garde en Europe Centrale : *Existe-il un art de l'Europe de l'est ?* d'Andrzej Turowski (1986), *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe centrale* de Krisztina Passuth (1988) et *Modern art in Eastern Europe : from the Baltic to the Balkans, 1890-1939* de Steven Mansbach (1999)¹. Mais ils évoquent à peine le cas de l'avant-garde bulgare. Il est vrai que, par rapport aux autres pays de l'est européen, comme la Pologne, la République tchèque, la Hongrie, la Roumanie ou la Serbie, plus proches des centres ou ayant d'autres prédispositions et relations à l'égard des nouvelles tendances, l'avant-garde bulgare semble à l'écart. S'agissant des ouvrages sur la littérature d'avant-garde, la situation est identique. Un livre comme *Modernisme en Europe*

¹ Andrzej Turowski, *Existe-il un art de l'Europe de l'est ? : Utopie et idéologie*, Paris 1986 ; Krisztina Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe centrale 1907-1927*, Paris 1988 ; Steven Allen Mansbach, *Modern art in Eastern Europe: from the Baltic to the Balkans, 1890-1939*, Cambridge 1999.

*centrale*² traite des avant-gardes littéraires en Europe Centrale, mais ignore les écrivains et poètes bulgares. Il y a encore une vingtaine d'années ce phénomène pouvait s'expliquer encore par la fermeture des frontières. Aujourd'hui il reste incompréhensible.

Dans les revues bulgares traitant des problèmes de l'art comme *Izkuštvo* (Art) et *Problemi na izkuštvo* (Problèmes de l'art), de nombreux articles publiés entre 1970 et 1988 sont consacrés aux artistes modernes de l'entre-deux-guerres et à leurs parcours artistiques³. Ces publications ne donnent toutefois pas lieu à des recherches plus approfondies⁴. L'ouvrage le plus intéressant et le plus complet, *Le maître et son temps*⁵, qui concerne l'une des figures emblématiques de la peinture bulgare, Vladimir Dimitrov Maistora, est resté pendant plus de deux décennies dans les tiroirs d'une maison d'édition avant de voir le jour en 1989, date est symbolique s'il en est. Ce n'est qu'après la chute du mur de Berlin que la recherche sur l'entre-deux-guerres peut prendre son envol, avec des chercheurs comme Ruža Marinska⁶, Irina Genova⁷, Tatjana Dimitrova ou Krasimira Koeva⁸

² Maria Delaperrière, *Modernisme en Europe centrale*, Tome I « Les avant-gardes », Paris 2000.

³ Comme exemples nous pouvons citer : Dimităr Avramov « Estetičeskite idei na Kiril Conev » (Les idées esthétiques de Kiril Conev), in : *Izkuštvo*, 4/5, 1971, 16-23 ; Tatjana Vučeva, « Vremeto v kartinite na Canko Lavrenov » (Le temps dans les tableaux de Canko Lavrenov), in : *Problemi na izkuštvo*, 2, 1977, 34-40 ; Iskra Velčeva, « Penčo Georgiev », in : *Izkuštvo*, 2, 1971, 14-9 ; Maksimilijan Kirov, « Xudožestvenijat ideal na Vladimir Dimitrov-Majstora » (L'idéal pictural de Vladimir Dimitrov-Majstora), in : *Problemi na izkuštvo*, 4, 1982, 32-45 ; et Tatjana Dimitrova, « Sirak Skitnik i Novite » (Sirak Skitnik et les Nouveaux), in : *Izkuštvo*, 5, 1982, 42-9.

⁴ Avant cette période des études ou des publications traitant les problèmes de l'avant-garde ou des nouvelles tendances en Bulgarie dans la période de l'entre-deux-guerres sont quasi absentes. L'idéologie du parti communiste considère les influences venues de l'Europe occidentale comme décadentes et refuse d'admettre leur présence dans les œuvres picturales et littéraires des artistes de cette période. Il en a résulté l'oubli d'une partie des artistes dont l'œuvre n'a pas pu être rangée dans les cases idéologiques comme glorification du passé, de la tradition, des luttes sanglantes pour la liberté du pays. Tel est le cas par exemple de l'écrivain Čavdar Mutafov (1889-1954) ou d'une grande partie des dessins de Sirak Skitnik (1883-1943) exposés pour la première fois en 1993 à la galerie de « Šipka 6 » à Sofia. L'exposition organisée par Irina Genova et Tanjana Dimitrova s'intitule *Neposnatijat Sirak Skitnik* (Sirak Skitnik, l'inconnu).

⁵ Dimităr Avramov, *Majstorăt i negovoto vreme* (Le maître et son temps), Sofia 1989.

⁶ Ruža Marinska, *20te godini v bălgarskoto izobražitelno izkuštvo* (Les années vingt dans les Beaux arts bulgares), Sofia 1994.

⁷ Irina Genova & Tatjana Dimitrova, *Izkuštvo v Bălgarija prez 20te godini-modernizăm i nacionalna ideja* (L'art en Bulgarie pendant les années vingt – modernisme et idée nationale), Sofia 2002.

⁸ Krassimira Koeva, « Bălgarskata živopis prez 20 godini meždū rodnoto i modernizma » (La peinture bulgare des années vingt : entre le national et le modernisme), in : *Problemi na izkuštvo*, (Problèmes de l'art), numéro spécial, 1991, 16-26.

en histoire de l'art et Edvin Sugarev⁹, Ivan Sarandev¹⁰ ou Alexandăr Jordanov¹¹ et bien d'autres en études littéraires.

Les liens des intellectuels bulgares avec l'art et la littérature de l'Europe sont très ambigus : il y des artistes qui font leurs études en Europe, ils font des voyages ou de courts séjours dans les centres européens ; cependant, tous ne souhaitent pas propager les nouvelles tendances en Bulgarie et considèrent la nouveauté comme dangereuse. La plupart des jeunes intellectuels rentrent en Bulgarie, quelques uns seulement s'installent définitivement à l'étranger, comme Georges Papazoff (1894-1972) qui a vécu en France ou Nikolaj Diulgheroff (1901-1982) en Italie¹².

Nous constatons que la destination la plus prisée par ces jeunes intellectuels est l'Allemagne. Pendant cette période, les relations diplomatiques entre les deux pays sont très favorables. A cet égard, il faut rappeler les origines franco-autrichiennes du prince de Bulgarie Ferdinand Saxe-Cobourg Gotha¹³, qui règne de 1887 à 1918. Ces liens dynastiques peuvent expliquer le penchant de l'art bulgare pour la Sécession et l'expressionnisme. Bien évidemment, nous ne pouvons pas ramener cet intérêt prononcé pour ces deux tendances novatrices aux seules relations diplomatiques, mais il y a une grande diaspora d'étudiants bulgares à Berlin et surtout à Munich¹⁴. Cependant, des artistes comme Penčo Georgiev (1900-1940) ou Nikolaj Rajnov (1889-1954), ou des écrivains comme Konstantin Konstantinov (1890-1970), effectuent des séjours en France.

L'Europe est très présente dans les revues littéraires et picturales par le biais des traductions de Verlaine, Mallarmé, Poe ou Claudel, par des reproductions de tableaux et de gravures de Munch, Rops, Chagall, Egon Schiele ou Kandinsky, par les relations avec Herwarth Walden et sa revue

⁹ Edvin Sugarev, *Bălgarskijat ekspresionizъм* (L'expressionnisme bulgare), Sofia 1988.

¹⁰ Ivan Sarandev, *Bălgarska literatura (1918-1945)* (Littérature bulgare, 1918-1945), Tome I, Plovdiv 2004 ; Tome II, Plovdiv 2005.

¹¹ Alexandăr Jordanov, *Svoečuzdijat modernizъм* (Le modernisme, notre-étranger), Sofia 1993.

¹² Voir la contribution d'Irina Genova dans ce livre.

¹³ En 1886 le prince de Bulgarie, Alexandre I^{er}, est obligé d'abdiquer. Il faut lui trouver rapidement un remplaçant digne, qui puisse attirer aussi les sympathies des grandes Puissances. Une tâche qui s'avère assez difficile pour le Conseil de régence. Une délégation fait le tour des États européens à la recherche d'un prince convenable. Après de longues hésitations et une situation politique troublée en Bulgarie, le 25 juin 1887 Ferdinand de Saxe-Cobourg Gotha, le seul candidat réel, est élu prince de Bulgarie. Suite à la situation dramatique dans le pays, après son engagement à côté des Alliés, le monarque abdique en faveur de son fils Boris III en 1918.

¹⁴ Voir Valentin Angelov, « Bălgarskite xudožnici v Mjunxen meždū dvete svetovni vojni », in : Valentin Angelov, *Mjunxen i bălgarskoto izobrazitelno izkustvo*, Sofia 2001, 105-35.

*Der Sturm*¹⁵, avec *Die Aktion*¹⁶ de Franz Pfemfert, avec Lubomir Micić et la revue *Zenit*¹⁷. Sans être profonds, ces liens témoignent de l'intérêt des artistes bulgares pour la nouveauté et de leur désir de collaborer avec des confrères étrangers qui partagent leurs visions et leurs idées sur l'art et la littérature.

Dans la correspondance de Micić et de l'écrivain et critique Geo Milev on a retrouvé des lettres au sujet de l'exposition internationale sur l'art nouveau organisée par *Zenit* du 9 au 19 avril 1924 à Belgrade, à laquelle ont participé trois artistes bulgares vivement recommandés par Geo Milev. Il s'agit de Mirčo Kačulev (1901-1972), d'Ana Balsamadžieva et d'Ivan Bojadžiev (1894-1981).

Il est intéressant de mentionner que dans la période de l'entre-deux-guerres il n'y a pratiquement pas ou très peu d'expositions d'artistes étrangers organisées en Bulgarie¹⁸. D'une part, la capitale d'un petit pays n'attire pas les artistes européens qui cherchent surtout une reconnaissance dans les centres culturels européens. D'autre part, les artistes et surtout le public bulgares ne manifestent pas une très grande curiosité envers les expériences d'avant-garde. La seule personnalité connue qui est venue en Bulgarie, est Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. En 1932, le pape du futurisme donne une conférence dans le salon du théâtre « Royal » à Sofia. Pourtant, la seule personne qui avait adhéré à ses idées et qui était entrée

¹⁵ Lors de son deuxième séjour en Allemagne à Berlin, Geo Milev, poète, critique d'art et de littérature, traducteur, créateur et rédacteur en chef des revues *Vezni* (1919-1922) et *Plamák* (1924) noue des liens avec Herwarth Walden et la revue *Der Sturm*. Rentré en Bulgarie, il continue à entretenir des relations avec la revue allemande et son rédacteur.

¹⁶ En 1918, Geo Milev traduit en allemand *Bogomilski legendi* (Légendes bogomiles) de Nikolaj Rajnov. Une partie du texte traduit est publié dans la revue *Die Aktion*.

¹⁷ La collaboration entre Lubomir Micić et Geo Milev a été longtemps ignorée. En 1986, la revue *Izkuštvo* (Art) publie l'article « La collaboration de la revue *Zenit* avec les artistes bulgares » de l'historien de l'art serbe Irina Subotić. C'est la première fois que le lecteur bulgare prend connaissance des relations entre les revues *Plamák* et *Zenit* et leurs rédacteurs. Voir Subotić Irina, « Sâtrudničestvoto na spisanie *Zenit* s bălgarskite xudožnici », in : *Izkuštvo*, 3, 1986, 7-15.

¹⁸ Du 18 décembre 1921 au 10 janvier 1922, Geo Milev organise dans sa maison une exposition expressionniste qui comprend environ 60 gravures et aquarelles des futuristes, primitifs et cubistes européens. C'est la première exposition de ce genre. Selon des témoignages, il se serait agi de reproductions. Aujourd'hui, les chercheurs n'ont pas la possibilité de reconstruire les tableaux exposés. Nous retrouvons l'annonce de l'exposition dans le numéro 10 de la revue *Vezni* et l'intention de l'organisateur de la prolonger dans le numéro 14. Geo Milev cite les noms de Kandinsky, Kokoschka, Franz Marc, Munch. Le rédacteur en chef s'inspire sans doute des expositions de *Der Sturm* auxquelles il avait assisté. Voir, « Ekspresionistična izložba » (Exposition expressionniste), in : *Vezni*, 10, 1921, 195 ; *Vezni*, 14, 1922, 260. Voir aussi Ruža Marinska, *Geo Milev risuva* (Geo Milev peint), Sofia 1995, 121.

en contact avec lui lors de l'édition de la revue *Crescendo*¹⁹, Kiril Krăstev (1904-1991), ne souhaite pas rencontrer Marinetti à cause de son engagement politique. C'est ce qu'il affirme dans ses *Souvenirs de la vie culturelle bulgare de l'entre-deux-guerres*²⁰. Tout de même nous reconnaissons Krăstev sur la photo de groupe des membres du PEN club, faite avec Marinetti devant le théâtre « Royal », aujourd'hui le Théâtre de l'armée nationale.

Comment les artistes bulgares de l'époque perçoivent-ils l'Europe ? L'Europe n'est pas présentée directement, comme une entité géographique. Elle se manifeste indirectement, dans les créations artistiques, dans le rapport des artistes avec l'étranger et les nouvelles tendances qui s'introduisent dans la vie culturelle. Ce rapport est contradictoire et conflictuel et s'exprime doublement : dans la tension national/étranger, mais aussi dans la manière de voir la ville, notamment Paris. Par les exemples que nous évoquerons ici, nous tenterons de percevoir la complexité de cette relation avec l'Europe, qui joue un rôle clé dans le développement de l'art et de la littérature bulgares.

L'Europe vue à travers les débats critiques

Il nous a été très difficile de choisir des exemples, car la vie artistique en Bulgarie est très diversifiée. Les artistes du mouvement « Rodno izkustvo »²¹ (Art « natal »/national), qui fait appel à un retour à la tradition et à la vie rurale, collaborent souvent avec des groupes d'artistes considérés comme modernistes « extrêmes », à l'exemple du cercle qui se forme au-

¹⁹ La revue *Crescendo* (1922) est l'organe d'un groupe de jeunes enthousiastes de la ville de Jambol. De cette revue sortent uniquement trois numéros. Cependant, son rédacteur en chef, Kiril Krăstev, et ses collaborateurs manifestent leur intérêt pour les nouvelles tendances, le futurisme et le dadaïsme.

²⁰ Kiril Krăstev, *Spomeni za kulturnija život meždū dvete svetovni vojni* (Souvenirs de la vie culturelle de l'entre-deux-guerres), Sofia 1988, 46.

²¹ Le groupe « Art "natal"/national » est créé à la fin de 1919 par Ceno Todorov, Ivan Lazarov, Stefan Ivanov, Nikola Mavrodinov, Alexandăr Mutafov, Nikola Ganušev, Boris Denev, Konstantin Štărkelov, Elena Karamixajlova, Elisaveta Konsulova-Vazova etc. Ce sont des professeurs de l'Académie de beaux-arts et des peintres. La première exposition du groupe est organisée en 1920 dans le salon de l'Académie. Le groupe se transforme en mouvement qui englobe plusieurs domaines. Il s'intéresse au passé et à la tradition, aux rites et à la mythologie. Deux critiques d'art font le lien entre « Art natal » et « Heimatkunst ». Le premier est Geo Milev dans son article « Rodno izkustvo » (Art natal/national), en 1919, et le second est Dimităr Avramov in : Dimităr Avramov, « Za dviženieto "Rodno izkustvo" v bălgarskata živopis » (A propos du mouvement « Art natal/national » dans la peinture bulgare), in : *Problemi na izkustvoto*, 4, 1971, 5-14.

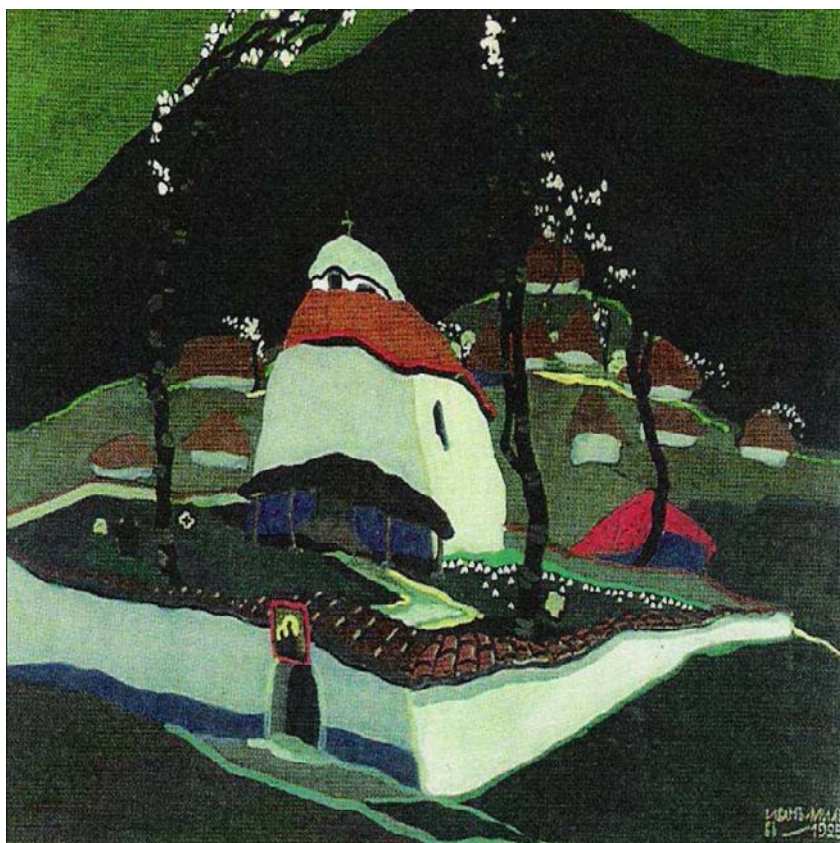


Fig. 5 : Ivan Milev, *L'oratoire du monastère de Măgliš*, 1925.
Détrempe, bronze sur papier, 57,5 x 74 cm. Galerie municipale de Sofia.

tour de la revue *Vezni* de Geo Milev. Un exemple type est le peintre Ivan Milev (1897-1927). Sans formation étrangère, ce jeune peintre pourtant réussit avec son style inspiré de la Sécession et influencé par Gustav Klimt à attirer l'attention des critiques de l'époque²². Interprétant les motifs du folklore bulgare avec des personnages habillés en costumes traditionnels et

²² En 1940, Evdokija Petrova dans son livre consacré à Ivan Milev fait un parallèle entre Klimt et Milev ; cependant elle n'évoque pas le fait que l'artiste ait fait un séjour à Vienne en 1922. Elle rejette catégoriquement l'influence de Klimt sur l'œuvre d'Ivan Milev. Selon elle, la similitude dans les œuvres des deux peintres doit être cherchée dans une ressemblance psychologique et morale.



Fig. 6 : Ivan Milev, *Nos mères sont toujours habillées en noir*, 1926.
Aquarelle, papier, 58 x 86 cm. Galerie Nationale des Beaux Arts, Sofia

jouant des instruments traditionnels, il rentre parfaitement dans le cadre de l'idéologie du mouvement « Rodno izkustvo ». Cependant son style est complètement opposé au classicisme : les fonds sans profondeurs, les visages et les corps schématisés mais stylisés, l'expressivité des corps souvent pliés, les têtes penchées ou basculées en arrière, les formes géométriques, les couleurs saturées et expressives avec une grande précision dans le détail, tous ces éléments témoignent d'un style original. Les débuts d'Ivan Milev sont vivement encouragés par le promoteur de l'avant-garde bulgare Geo Milev dans un compte rendu publié dans le journal *Zarja*²³ : « Ivan Milev possède avant tout une vie intérieure, il a une sensibilité pour la ligne et la couleur et si, par moments, il n'est pas entièrement authentique, cela vient probablement de son âge [...]. C'est un talent qui doit être encouragé. » Mais que penser d'une réaction comme

²³ Geo Milev, « Izložbi » (Expositions), in: *Zarja*, 2146, 1920.

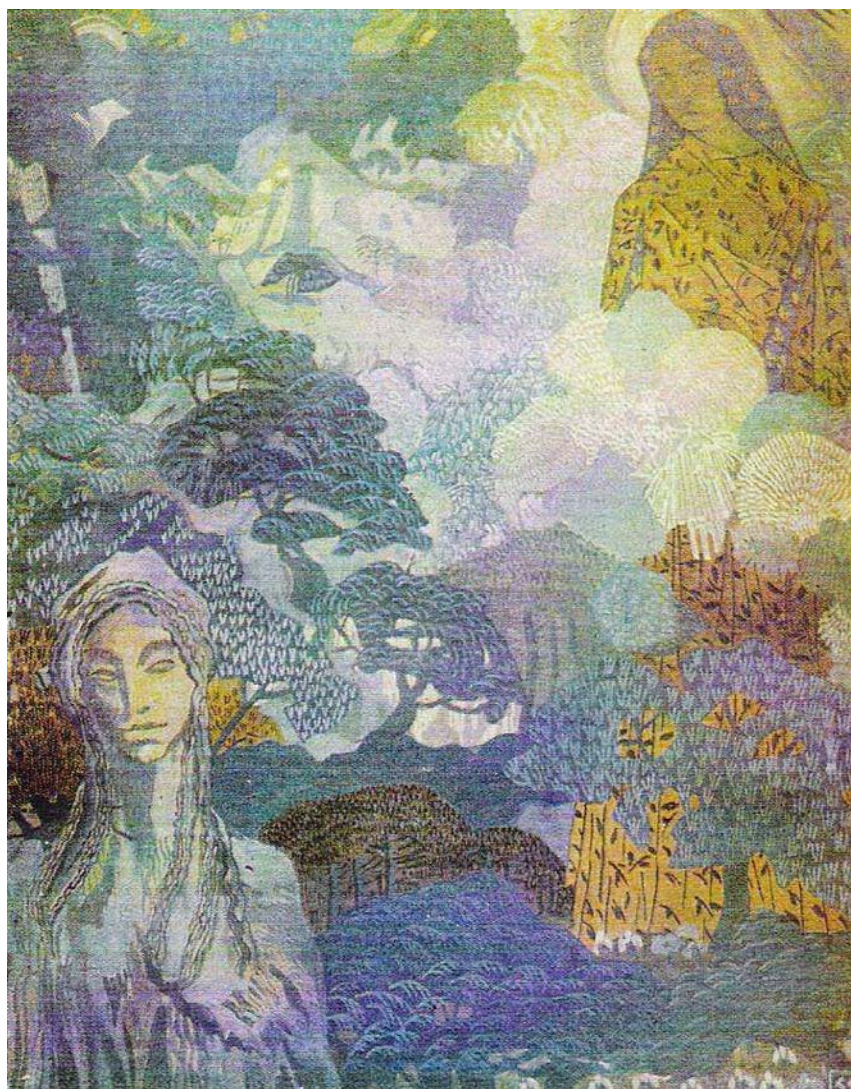


Fig. 7 : Sirak Skitnik, *Annonciation*, 1922. Huile sur toile.
Galerie Nationale des Beaux Arts, Sofia.

celle qui transparaît dans l'article « Aimez-vous Milev ? »²⁴, dans lequel un certain Dobrjanov affirme en 1927: « J'admets que Milev voyait comme il peignait [...]. Mais pourquoi tous les autres sont-ils obligés de rester comme lui bigles, bossus, etc., pour voir un art là où il y a seulement du barbouillage ? » Le refus d'accepter la nouveauté, même celle utilisant des formes et des sujets traditionnels, est la position habituelle de certains critiques, protecteurs des pratiques de l'art et de la littérature du passé.

Sirak Skitnik, de son vrai nom Panajot Todorov, l'un des rares artistes bulgares de cette génération à avoir suivi des études en Russie, plus particulièrement à l'école d'Ekaterina Zvanceva à Saint-Petersbourg, milite également pour un renouveau dans l'art. Inspiré par son professeur Bakste et par d'autres artistes du mouvement « Mir iskusstva », il a un penchant pour l'art décoratif et pour l'expressionnisme. Au sujet de son tableau « Annonciation », qui remporte le concours « Peinture natale/nationale » en 1922, Petăr Morozov écrit : « La critique d'art qui tient à l'art natal, surtout maintenant, doit résoudre des questions difficiles, vu que, dans le dernier concours de peinture, le ministère de l'Éducation avec l'aide de l'Académie des Beaux arts proclame l'expressionnisme comme art officiel bulgare »²⁵. Ce tableau est certainement intéressant et novateur pour la peinture bulgare. Les couleurs froides, le traitement du paysage, l'espace saturé et stylisé et les visages des femmes révèlent un symbolisme incontestable. Mais en aucun cas nous ne pouvons qualifier ce tableau d'expressionniste. En revanche, nous pouvons dire que sont expressionnistes les illustrations de Sirak Skitnik pour le livre de Čavdar Mutafov *Marionnettes*, paru en 1920. Les personnages imagés, non réels, sont présentés en mouvement. Ils contiennent en eux toute l'agressivité d'un monde violent. Les marionnettes et les masques sont présentés avec sarcasme. L'auteur et l'illustrateur les font jouer chacun de son côté dans un monde-prison où ils s'égarent dans l'ennui et le néant. Le seul sentiment qui les obsède est l'horreur face à leurs craintes. L'écrivain ne s'intéresse pas à l'homme réel, mais à l'atmosphère, aux événements aux problèmes qui l'entourent.

²⁴ Dobrjanov, « Xaresva li vi Milev ? », in: *Mir*, 8030, 1927, 1.

²⁵ Petăr Morozov, « Dve xudožestveni izložbi » (Deux expositions picturales), in: *Razvigor*, 109, 1922, 3.



Fig. 8 : Sirak Skitnik, Illustrations vers le livre de Čavdar Mutafov *Marionnettes*, 1920

Dans le texte de Morozov, nous percevons le problème de la définition des nouvelles tendances en Bulgarie. Le futurisme, le dadaïsme, l'abstractionnisme sont très peu connus et quasiment pas explorés, mis à part quelques petites exceptions. Dans la première décennie du XX^e siècle, les jeunes artistes et écrivains tentent de familiariser le public bulgare avec le symbolisme. L'expressionnisme est présenté et défendu en Bulgarie par Geo Milev. En pratique, il se présente surtout comme un nouveau terme utilisé par certains critiques pour englober toute nouvelle manifestation artistique, y compris la Sécession.

La réaction de Geo Milev²⁶ au sujet des illustrations de Sirak Skitnik pour *Marionnettes* est surprenante. Selon lui, il y a une disharmonie entre le style souple et nuancé de Čavdar Mutafov et les larges taches noires et bleues marines des illustrations de Sirak Skitnik. Il ne nie pas les qualités des illustrations, il conteste seulement qu'elles conviennent au texte. Nous pouvons donner raison à Geo Milev en ce sens que les illustrations peuvent être vues séparément du texte et analysées comme des dessins autonomes. Mais vu d'aujourd'hui, ce fait n'enlève rien à l'originalité et à la présentation du livre comme un ensemble de textes et d'images, comme un mélange de deux styles, pictural et littéraire. Cette critique démontre un libre échange des idées et des opinions de la part des intellectuels qui prônent les nouvelles tendances. Parfois, ces discussions créent aussi de l'animosité entre eux et dans les cercles formés autour des revues littéraires et artistiques²⁷.

Le refus de comprendre et d'accepter les nouvelles tendances n'est pas toujours lié à un réel souci du goût, mais à la peur que la nouveauté puisse s'installer dans l'espace culturel bulgare pour y prendre la place de la tradition. Ce sentiment d'insécurité par rapport à tout ce qui vient de l'extérieur est tout à fait compréhensible si l'on tient compte du contexte historique du pays²⁸. En ce sens, le problème de la tradition et du « natal », du national, devient, pour certains, une question de patriotisme.

Les articles sur ce sujet remplissent la presse au début des années vingt. Des articles comme « Rodno izkustvo » (L'art "natal"/national)²⁹, « Svoe ili čužno ? » (Sien ou étranger ?)³⁰ ou encore « "Rodno" ili "čužno" »

²⁶ Geo Milev, « Čavdar Mutafov: *Marionetki* » (Čavdar Mutafov: *Marionettes*), in : *Vezni*, 4/5, 1920-1921, 190-3.

²⁷ Voir Elka Trajkova, *Balgarski literaturni polemiki : ot načaloto na XX vek do 70-te godini na veka* (Les polémiques littéraires bulgares du début du 20^e siècle jusqu'aux années 70), Sofia 2001, 35-153.

²⁸ La Bulgarie est sous la domination ottomane pendant une période d'environ cinq cent ans de 1396 à 1878. La religion, la tradition, le folklore et la langue sont les seuls moyens qui aident la population à préserver son identité culturelle. Bien que le pays retrouve son indépendance avec la guerre russo-turque (1877-1878), il continue à être à la merci des grandes puissances. Les premières décennies du 20^e siècle s'avèrent très difficiles. Les deux guerres balkaniques et ensuite la Première guerre mondiale plongent le pays dans de graves crises, économiques, politiques et sociales, et renforcent d'une certaine manière la tension national/étranger.

²⁹ Geo Milev, « Rodno izkustvo » (Art natal/national), in : *Vezni*, 1, 1920-21, 40-50.

³⁰ Milev Teodor, « Svoe ili čužno ? » (Sien ou étranger ?), in : *Iztočok*, 1, 1925; Cité in : Sava Vasilev, *Literaturnen krąg Strelec* (Le cercle littéraire *Sagittaire*), Veliko Tărnovo 1995, 53-6.

(« Natal/national » ou « étranger »)³¹ exposent une vision ambivalente de la notion de modernité. Cependant, positives ou négatives, les réactions au sujet des nouvelles tendances sont bien présentes. Très typique est par exemple la position de Geo Milev. Novateur, ayant fait des études à Leipzig, puis des séjours à Berlin et à Londres, Milev a une vision tout à fait autre de l'art moderne. Il proclame le fragment et la synthèse comme éléments de base de l'art nouveau. Rédacteur en chef des revues *Vežni* et *Plamäk*, poète, journaliste, critique d'art et de littérature, théoricien, peintre, il est pour l'abandon de la tradition, du national et du populaire. Milev met en garde ses contemporains contre le sentiment national : « Sans le sentiment national, l'homme devient habitant de la planète Mars. L'importance du sentiment national comme force spirituelle chez l'homme s'étale dans son subconscient [...] passé du subconscient au conscient, le sentiment national devient nationalisme, patriotisme, avec lequel le peintre n'a rien à voir »³². Il adhère à l'expressionnisme et défend également l'idée d'un art unifié : « Ni l'étranger, ni le nôtre n'existent, tout est la même chose »³³. Cette idée se développe un peu plus tard avec le cercle littéraire *Strelec*³⁴ dont Atanas Iliev, l'un de ses idéologues, formule l'objectif comme étant « l'eupéanisation » du peuple bulgare, sans pour autant que l'on perde ce qu'il recèle de plus précieux en tant qu'entité ethnique possédant sa physionomie propre³⁵. Pour lui, « le natal peut nous amener vers l'étranger et l'étranger peut nous diriger vers le natal et faciliter le processus d'approfondissement en lui »³⁶.

Ces positions parlent d'un mouvement et d'une évolution de la vision des artistes et partant du public sur nouvelles tendances venues de l'Europe. Cependant, même plus proche, cette Europe reste toujours autre, différente non seulement en ce qu'elle s'oppose au natal, mais aussi en qu'elle demeure inaccessible. Le complexe du retard par rapport à l'Ouest manifeste selon Alexandăr Jordanov « tous les obstacles d'une ci-

³¹ Ivan Radoslavov, « "Rodno" ili "čuždo" », in : *Xiperion*, VI, 6/7, 1927; cité dans Sava Vasilev, *Literaturna žadruka Xiperion* (Le groupe littéraire *Xiperion*), Veliko Tărnovo 1996, 171-5.

³² Geo Milev, « Rodno izkustvo », 41.

³³ Geo Milev, « Posoki i cel » (Directions et buts), in : *Vežni*, 2, 1919, 18.

³⁴ Le cercle littéraire *Strelec* (Sagittaire) est formé en 1926 autour de Konstantin Gălabov. Au début les membres du cercle publient leurs articles dans la revue *Iztoke* (1925-1927). En 1927, ils publient leur propre revue qui s'intitule *Strelec*, dont les rédacteurs sont Konstantin Gălabov et Čavdar Mutafov. La devise du cercle est l'union du bulgare et de l'universel.

³⁵ Atanas Iliev, « Zovât na rodinata » (L'appel de la patrie), in : *Iztoke*, 40, 1926, 1.

³⁶ Atanas Iliev, « Konfliktăt meždru rodnoto i čuždoto » (Le conflit entre le natal et l'étranger), in : *Iztoke*, 49, 1926.

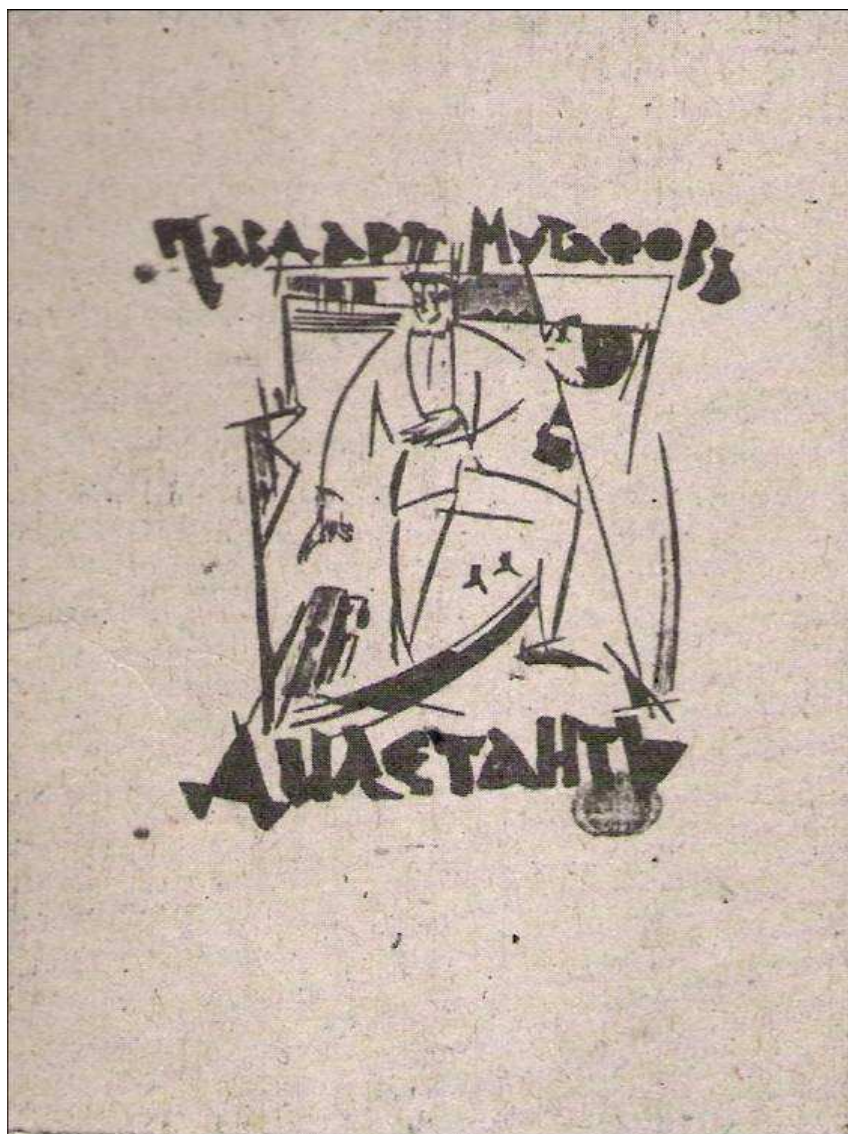


Fig. 9 : La couverture de la première édition du livre de Čavdar Mutafov *Dilettante*, 1926, faite par Dečko Uzunov

vilisation mal comprise »³⁷. Deux éléments freinent d'une certaine manière le développement « logique » de l'art et de la littérature. Ce sont la prise de conscience du retard et de l'isolement culturel du pays et la volonté de rattraper ce retard et d'accélérer le rythme de « l'eupéanisation ». Si ce dernier élément s'oppose finalement au développement de l'art, c'est parce qu'il ne peut être soutenu par la situation économique, sociale et culturelle de la Bulgarie.

L'Europe vue à travers l'évocation de la ville

Les artistes, poètes et écrivains s'intéressent à la ville moderne, à son dynamisme et son décor. En ce sens, le roman de Čavdar Mutafov, *Dilettante*³⁸, traite le problème de l'adaptation et de la vie de l'homme moderne dans un décor urbain qui l'attire et le repousse à la fois.

Le Dilettante est dépassé par le rythme de la ville et par les objets. Il ressent la vie matérielle comme une menace permanente qui pourrait l'éliminer. « Tout compte fait, son chapeau existait uniquement pour qu'il le cherche, puisque ses gants et son mouchoir se perdaient tous seuls, rongés par l'envie »³⁹. Le Dilettante compare l'existence de la ville à « une grande bête fatiguée » qui « respire à côté de lui à travers les canaux », qui « tord la souffrance de sa panse dans des spasmes obscurs » et qui « étale sur la rue ses écailles ». La ville lui paraît non seulement menaçante, elle ne lui permet pas non plus de se sentir vivant : « Je vis et je me déplace – comme si je n'existais pas dans le temps. La vie passe sous mes fenêtres ». À la recherche de cette sensation, il décide de retrouver la nature, mais celle-ci ne peut pas exaucer ses vœux : « Donne moi la vie [...], la joie de périr : moi-même ! »⁴⁰ Calme et paisible, elle est tout le contraire de la ville dynamique et bruyante. Après ce rendez-vous avec « l'Éden du monde », il se rend compte de son attachement à la ville. Il aime les parfums, « ces images presque spirituelles de la matière : l'odeur de l'arbre poli en blanc ; l'ivresse étrange de l'essence et des pneus »⁴¹, l'odeur de la fumée des cigarettes, l'odeur du luxe.

³⁷ Jordanov, *Svoečuvstvijat modernizëm*, 17.

³⁸ Le roman *Dilettante* est écrit en 1921, cependant il ne voit jour qu'en 1926. Aucune maison d'édition ne souhaite prendre le risque de publier le roman vu son sujet et son style. L'auteur publie à compte d'auteur quelques exemplaires, qu'il offre à ses amis.

³⁹ Čavdar Mutafov, *Diletant* (Dilettante), Sofia 1992, 8.

⁴⁰ Mutafov, *Diletant*, 24.

⁴¹ Mutafov, *Diletant*, 26.

Dans le personnage du Dilettante, il n'y a rien de traditionnel, de romantique ou de nostalgique, bref rien de ce qui caractérise à cette période la plupart des romans et des récits bulgares. Ce livre reste à part, incompris non seulement par le nombre réduit de lecteurs qui ont eu la chance de le lire, mais également par la critique. L'image de la ville, repoussante et attirante à la fois, avec son dynamisme, ses vitrines, ses affiches, ses voitures, l'image de la femme et enfin de la recherche de soi-même, sortent des sujets courants qui font appel à la vie rurale ou à des sujets historiques.

Paris a toujours attiré les artistes bulgares et bien qu'une grande partie des intellectuels de l'entre-deux-guerres continuent à faire leurs études en Allemagne, certaines des œuvres artistiques et littéraires mettent l'accent sur Paris. Dans le roman grotesque et diabolique de Svetoslav Minkov (1902-1966) et Konstantin Konstantinov (1890-1970), publié en 1933, *Le cœur dans la boîte en carton*⁴², le séjour du poète Valerian Plamenov à Paris nous est présenté sur le mode de la visite guidée. Le héros ne ressent pas ce voyage comme une expérience extraordinaire, son but n'est pas de découvrir la ville. Loin d'y trouver de l'inspiration ou un sentiment d'émerveillement, le héros vit les promenades et visites de jour et de nuit comme un passe-temps en attendant de retrouver son cœur. Le regard qu'il porte sur la capitale française est plutôt critique. Il est dérangé par l'enthousiasme des touristes qui, avec leurs appareils photos et les carnets de voyage, n'arrêtent pas de prendre des notes et des photos de souvenirs. La capitale est démagnétisée, quadrillée par un tourisme d'abattage : « Ce sont les martyrs du tourisme, du régime sec, les maniaques de la photo d'amateur ou de collection. Ils ont parcouru des milliers de kilomètre, ils ont même traversé des océans pour parvenir jusqu'ici [...]. Les têtes se tournent, les jumelles se braquent à la verticale, les Kodaks se déclenchent »⁴³. Quand le héros se promène dans la ville nocturne, des poupées expressionnistes le regardent des vitrines du *Printemps*. La lampe dans sa chambre d'hôtel est surmontée d'un abat-jour futuriste. L'idée de l'auteur est intéressante, l'endroit idéal pour chercher un cœur perdu est bien évidemment Paris, la ville romantique par excellence. Pourtant, le héros ne découvre que l'image commerciale et touristique de cette ville tant rêvée par les poètes. Valerian Plamenov repart sans avoir retrouvé son cœur perdu, avec un goût d'amertume du souvenir de l'endroit obscur et étrange « Le bateau des rêves », où il a été sous l'emprise de l'opium.

⁴² Dans ce texte nous utilisons la traduction française de *Le cœur dans la boîte en carton* faite par Krasimir Kavaldjiev et Eric Naulleau, publiée par L'Esprit des péninsules en 1998.

⁴³ Svetoslav Minkov & Konstantin Konstantinov, *Le cœur dans la boîte en carton*, Paris 1998, 56.

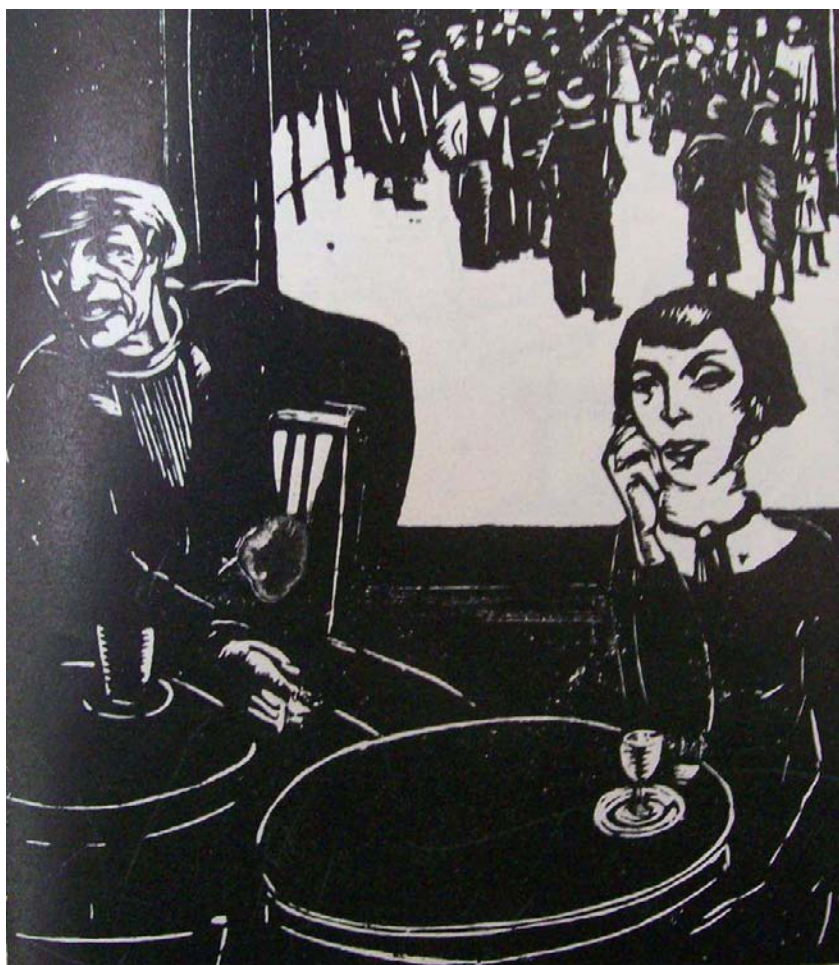


Fig. 10 : Penčo Georgiev, *Cabaret I*, 1931.
Eau-forte, 25 x 26 cm. Galerie Nationale des Beaux Arts, Sofia

Cependant, le lieu principal où se déroule le roman est Sofia. Aussi pouvons-nous comparer les deux endroits, la capitale d'un centre culturel européen et la capitale d'un pays balkanique. Tel n'est pas vraiment le but des deux auteurs, qui se concentrent non sans humour sur l'atmosphère littéraire qui règne dans les cafés sofiotes. Ils évoquent donc surtout les lieux favoris des artistes, plus concrètement un café nommé *Madagascar*. À l'intérieur sont assis à la fois des intellectuels, représentants de la vieille génération, et des jeunes artistes, représentants de l'art prolétarien. Ils

essayent de comprendre comment un jeune poète a réussi à partir à Paris et quel est le besoin qu'on peut avoir de l'étranger. Ils cherchent aussi la réponse à la question de savoir pourquoi personne ne veut lire des livres bulgares. Le groupe des traditionalistes s'avère très critique envers les jeunes écrivains qui se disent modernistes. Selon les vieux, les jeunes mettent en péril la littérature et renient toutes les valeurs culturelles du passé. Les jeunes modernistes de leur côté souhaitent parler du présent et non plus du passé. Le point de vue des prolétaires est que « les masses populaires ne veulent pas de chansons sur la lune mais sur la paix ». Dans ces conversations, les réflexions se fondent non pas sur des problèmes pertinents de l'art et la littérature, mais sur des faits divers. Minkov et Konstantinov recherchent explicitement cette image caricaturale des personnages et de leurs conversations. Ils décrivent l'intelligentsia bulgare de l'entre-deux-guerres qui est à la recherche de ses repères et toujours devant le dilemme entre couper ou garder le lien avec le passé et la tradition. Le protagoniste du livre, le poète Valerian Plamenov, ne se sent à l'aise nulle part et ne retrouve son inspiration et son cœur, ni à Paris, ni à Sofia.

Ce malaise et cette solitude ne sont pas exceptionnels. Bien qu'il y ait des revues littéraires et artistiques autour desquelles se regroupent les intellectuels, nous avons l'impression que le combat pour un renouveau se mène individuellement par chaque artiste. Les manifestes artistiques publiés dans des revues comme *Vezni*, *Zlatorog*⁴⁴ ou *Crescendo* portent tous la signature d'un seul auteur, à l'exception du « Manifeste du groupe de la lutte contre les poètes »⁴⁵ signé Kiril Krăstev, Vasil Petkov, Nedjalko Gegov et Totjo Brănekov. Les peintres, les poètes et les écrivains ne se réunissent pas autour d'un programme esthétique commun. Chacun perçoit et expérimente les nouvelles idées et tendances à sa manière.

⁴⁴ *Zlatorog* (1920-1943) est une revue littéraire et artistique qui prône l'individualisme artistique et qui s'oppose aux écoles et aux mouvements artistiques, ainsi qu'à l'engagement politique dans l'art. Elle est rédigée par Vladimir Vasilev, Nikolaj Liliev et Sirak Skitnik.

⁴⁵ « Manifest na družestvoto za borba protiv poetite » (Le manifeste du groupe de lutte contre les poètes) est publié en 1926 à Jambol, copiant le folio de quatre pages des manifestes futuristes italiens. Il est considéré comme une plaisanterie historique et culturelle dadaïste que très peu de personnes peuvent comprendre. Voir Kiril Krăstev, *Spomeni za kulturnija život meždú dvete svetovni vojni*, 54-5.



Figs. 11 & 12 :

Penčo Georgiev, *Clown*, 1930-1932 (gauche).

Eau-forte, 24 x 21 cm. Galerie Nationale des Beaux Arts, Sofia.

Penčo Georgiev, *Musiciens de la rue*, 1931. Eau-forte, 20 x 31 cm.

Galerie Nationale des Beaux Arts, Sofia.

Un autre artiste qui aborde le thème de Paris est Penčo Georgiev. Ses gravures inspirées par son court séjour dans la capitale européenne, s'intéressent à la vie des gens ordinaires : la rue, le bistrot, l'ouvrier, la femme. La rue devient une scène pour les musiciens et les clowns ; les bistrots, un endroit de rencontre et de repos pour les ouvriers. La foule est présentée comme le public d'une action et l'attention du spectateur se dirige vers l'individu qui tout en étant isolé de la foule en fait inévitablement partie. Parfois nous remarquons une atmosphère romantique ou symbolique dans ces gravures qui se distinguent incontestablement des tableaux et gravures faits avant son séjour à Paris. Au début de sa carrière, très proche d'Ivan Milev, le jeune artiste est influencé par le style décoratif et la stylisation des formes des œuvres picturales de son ami. Les sujets qui l'inspirent sont relatifs à la vie quotidienne et au folklore, les personnages sont souvent présentés en train d'exécuter des rituels funéraires⁴⁶. Dans son cycle parisien, l'artiste s'intéresse toujours à

⁴⁶ Pour Iskra Velčeva (« Penčo Georgiev », in : *Izkustvo*, 2, 1971, 14-9) les scènes d'enterrement ou de commémorations font référence à l'insurrection de septembre 1923. Mais nous n'avons pas d'informations précises sur l'idée et le but de l'artiste.



Fig. 13 : Penčo Georgiev, *Toussain*, 1927. Huile sur toile, 101 x 117 cm.
Galerie Municipale de Sofia.

l'individu et à son comportement, mais décors et sujets sont plus proches de la vie contemporaine, des problèmes et de l'atmosphère de la grande ville et de ses habitants. Si les femmes, dans ses tableaux sur la vie quotidienne bulgare, portent des habits traditionnels et des voiles sur la tête, les personnages féminins du cycle parisien présentent la femme moderne et émancipée. La femme parisienne peut être seule dans la rue au milieu de la foule, serveuse dans un café ou cliente dans un autre, sans peur du regard accusateur des passants.

Les exemples peuvent être multipliés, mais nous avons pu voir la perception et l'exploration des nouvelles tendances par les artistes bulgares et leurs craintes par rapport à cette Europe qui les considère comme l'« autre », leurs visions et leurs impressions d'une capitale mythique, rêvée par une grande partie des artistes et des peintres, qui ne correspond pas

toujours à leurs attentes. Le rapport conflictuel avec l'« autre » européen, souvent perçu comme une menace pour la tradition et le natal, fait que la périphérie bulgare a touché à l'avant-garde sans laisser de noms dans l'histoire de l'art ou de la littérature européenne ou presque. Apparemment marginale et tout à fait éphémère, fort ambivalente quant à ses rapports avec le reste de l'Europe, l'avant-garde bulgare fait toutefois incontestablement partie de la mosaïque diversifiée des manifestations artistiques et littéraires européennes.

History or Europe: Images of Europe and Defense of Aesthetic Innovation in Post-1918 Poland

Ayelet Agnieszka Marczyk (University of Pennsylvania)

In the end three kings prevailed in idolatrous Europe: the first was Frederick II, a Prussian, the second was Catherine II, a Russian, and the third was Maria Teresa, an Austrian [...]. And the Polish Nation was tormented and killed and laid in a tomb, and the kings exclaimed: we have killed and buried Liberty! [...] But their cries were senseless [...] because the Polish Nation is not dead... on the third day the soul will return to the body and the Nation will rise from the dead, and it will free all the peoples of Europe from slavery.¹

Thus spoke Adam Mickiewicz in 1834. The national messianic ideology which he articulated in the 1830s and 40s survived the century of partitions and the First World War, and its echoes are still perceptible in Polish culture today.² In fact, this peculiar image of Poland as the ‘Christ of Nations’ was one of the most influential among 19th-century Polish national symbols. It inspired independence fighters and Romantic poets, and infuriated orthodox Catholic priests in the Polish lands and in exile. A few decades later it embarrassed Warsaw’s positivists and social reformers. During the fin-de-siècle it tempted symbolists with the allure of death and the ethereal world of the spirit, and during World War One it helped soldiers and civilians find meaning in a continent-wide conflict where Poles fought on both sides of both fronts. On the one hand, the many uses, transformations, and rejections of the image of the Polish nation as Europe’s suffering redeemer are specific to Poland – an eastern European community which entered the era of nation-building with its territory divided between its three more powerful neighbors. On the other, they

¹ Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* (Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage), Wrocław 1956, 21 and 35, my translation.

² See for example, Tomasz Terlikowski and Małgorzata Zdziechowska, “Jacy jesteśmy” (What are we like), in: *Wprost*, 49, December 7, 2008, 8-19, here 8-10.

hint at the difficulties involved in representing the relationship between any of Europe's margins and its cultural center.

One of the most difficult challenges facing minority cultures is the need to simultaneously assert belonging and not belonging to the dominant ethnic, linguistic, or cultural community. Mickiewicz and other Polish Romantics solved this problem by turning to Christian theology, which for centuries had been Europe's majority religion and one of the most powerful markers of European identity. Christian symbolism offered partitions-era Polish writers the archetypal symbol of simultaneous identity and difference: the image of Christ, a man-God who both belonged to the human community and transcended it. Thus the symbolic language that linked Poland to Christ bound the unique fate of the Poles to the fate of all Europe. At the same time, it placed Poland beyond Europe – yet not in Russia, Europe's geographic and cultural 'beyond', but in a quasi-transcendent, spiritual realm without territory or historical memory.

The symbolic appeal of the 'Christ of Nations' was further magnified by the political situation of partitioned Poland, which gave Polish culture and literature an almost unequaled importance. Mickiewicz, and later also Slowacki and Krasiński, were regarded as great prophets of independence and spiritual leaders of the nation. Even after the failure of the January Uprising in 1863, when Romantic visions of a future Poland lost credibility, literature remained a much more powerful carrier of Polish identity than any Polish political institutions at home or abroad. In the 1870s, positivist writers rejected the martyrology of national messianism, and instead turned to ideals of 'organic work' which aimed to advance the educational and economic development of Polish communities. Yet even though this cultural campaign moved away from Romantic ideals, its leading figures were still Polish writers, including Henryk Sienkiewicz, who wrote monumental historic sagas and trilogies *ku pokrzepieniu serc* – to keep Poles from losing heart. Thus, whether in the early or the late period of the Polish partitions, commitment to the suppressed nation was one of the defining features of Polish literature.

The achievement of national independence in 1918 drastically transformed the problem of symbolic representation of Poland's place in Europe. With the establishment of the Second Republic and its legitimization at Versailles, Poland became synonymous with a government, a geographical territory, and a newly formed parliament, which immediately set to work on administrative and economic integration of the formerly divided lands. For the first time in over a century, literature no longer had to herald independence or give hope to the resigned, and many young writers experienced 1918 as a cultural spring, a promise of unlimited

creative possibilities, and literature's liberation from patriotic and moral duties. Moreover, in 1918 the status of the Polish language shifted from subjugation to dominance. Whereas in the late 19th century Polish was actively suppressed in the German and Russian ruled parts of Poland, after 1918 it became the official language of the Polish Republic, a third of whose inhabitants spoke Ruthene, Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Lithuanian, and Belorussian.³ Writing in Polish thus lost the connotation of political resistance and became an expression of membership in the linguistic and cultural majority.

It should be noted that the Polish fin-de-siècle had seen attempts to sever the bond between literature and the nation, but these were only partially successful. It was in August 1915 that the first debate about literature's place in independent Poland started in the small mountain town of Zakopane where Franciszek Bujak invited Stefan Żeromski to speak in a series entitled "Economic Needs and Challenges". Żeromski was a paramount literary figure of the late-partitions period and his works did for Poland what Zola's did for France. He painstakingly documented the suffering, injustice, and hunger that dominated the lives of the urban masses and the rural poor, and he was often referred to as the conscience of Polish literature.⁴ It came as a surprise to his admirers and his detractors alike when in the 1915 lecture he proposed that Polish literature had to be freed from all social and political obligations. Devotion to the cause of Polish independence and constant focus on the plight of the enslaved nation, he said, limited Polish literature to the exploration of the "labyrinths of the Polish soul" while making it incapable of delving into the "labyrinths of the human soul".⁵ With national independence on the horizon, Żeromski claimed, Polish literature had to become European. By European literature he meant radically autonomous literature, which was censored neither by state authorities nor determined by the author's immersion in the Polish literary canon. He suggested further that to properly compare Polish literature to European literatures one should abandon the concepts 'better' and 'worse', and use notions of proximity and distance instead. To become European, Polish literature was not to

³ For the ethnic and linguistic composition of the Second Republic see Norman Davies, *God's Playground: a History of Poland*, Vol. 2, New York 2005, 406.

⁴ For an overview of Żeromski's work see Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, Berkeley 1983, 365-9.

⁵ Stefan Żeromski, "Literatura a Życie Polskie" (Literature and Polish Life), in: *Snobizm i postęp oraz inne utwory publicystyczne* (Snobbery and Progress and other essays), Kraków 2003, 216-36, here 228-9.

imitate other European literatures, but to be free as they were free – free from historic duties and free to set its own tasks and methods.⁶

In 1915 Polish independence was still only a vague possibility. It was only after the end of the First World War and the formation of a new Polish state, that Poland witnessed a proliferation of literary and artistic groups who shared Żeromski's views about modern literature. A search for new definitions of autonomous aesthetics was undertaken in all the major cities of the Second Republic – the Skamanders and futurists in Warsaw, futurists and formists in Krakow, the Zdrój expressionists in Poznań, and a new generation of Yiddish writers in Łódź and Wilno/Vilnius. These groups were sometimes united by joint performances and temporary alliances, and sometimes divided by rhetorical battles over the best approach to art, but they all shared the desire to influence Poland's culture and introduce the young republic to radically new art.

Although Poland's newly gained sovereignty removed the obvious political justifications of national messianic imagery, it did not eliminate its traces or its popular appeal. The end of the Great War brought not only the exhilaration of independence, but also hunger, uncertainty, and fears, and many writers and audiences sought comfort by turning to both real and mythologized examples of virtue in Polish history. In fact, many of Poland's most popular writers around 1918 were soldier-poets who represented the Great War as the moment of Poland's resurrection. Even some of the daily papers spoke of November 1918 as a visit to the resurrected Poland's empty tomb.⁷ In only a slightly more subtle way, the Second Republic's constitution from 1921 harkened back to messianic imagery by claiming that the Polish people desired "to ensure the development of all moral and material power for the good of the whole of regenerated mankind".⁸ The modernist innovators' greatest challenge was thus to justify their new art against the majority who felt that, precisely at the moment of independence, Polish literature should glorify and celebrate the nation by means of familiar, easily recognizable symbols.

The symbolic battles against Polish historical and national symbolism took much ingenuity and persistence. The modernist and avant-garde writers resorted to satire and self-parody, constructed psychological, literary, and sociological critiques, and sometimes employed elaborate philosophical arguments. In the context of these strategies of legitimizing

⁶ Stefan Żeromski, "Literatura a Życie Polskie", 219-21.

⁷ "U grobu Zmartwychwstającej" (At the Tomb of One Rising from the Dead), in: *Gazeta Poranna 2 Grosze* (Morning Gazette 2 Grosz), 277, November 10, 1918, 2.

⁸ Excerpts from the 1921 Constitution cited and translated by Davies, *God's Playground*, 402.

new art, images of Europe and Poland's place in it played a particularly important role. The innovators did not simply juxtapose a backward Poland against an idealized, advanced, and cosmopolitan Europe. Neither did they dismiss European culture altogether and identify exclusively with the cultural world of the Russian Revolution, which promised (briefly, at least) an alternative to Western European views about progress and artistic freedoms. Polish futurists developed close personal ties with Mayakovski and the Moscow cubo-futurist circle, but they nonetheless never stopped looking to Western Europe as they defined and redefined their public voices and identities.

In what follows we will consider Skamander and futurist texts that depict Europe as sarcastic laughter, a kitchen where Poles eat scraps that fall to the floor, a vast landscape of chaos and devastation, and an unwholesome feast devoured in a revolutionary frenzy. These images reveal little about interwar Europe itself, but they shed light on what it meant to create experimental art on Europe's cultural periphery in the aftermath of the Great War. They make clear that for Polish avant-garde writers innovation and imitation were not polar opposites. As they broke new ground in the local context, they often repeated gestures already carried out by their Western European contemporaries. Their explicit and implicit images of Europe also suggest that it is not possible to categorize Europe's cultural margins in terms of either privilege or disadvantage. Marginal positions combine privileges and burdens, and Polish-speaking artists sometimes accentuated their Polishness and sometimes concealed it, sometimes identified with Europe and sometimes identified Europe as a threat to their self-understanding. National independence thus radically transformed, but did not eliminate the need to find symbolic representations of Poland's simultaneous proximity and distance from Europe.

Laughter and Embarrassment

The Warsaw Skamander group, initially known as the Picador poets, gave their first poetry reading in Poland's new capital only two weeks after the proclamation of national independence.⁹ They advocated, above all, a poetic language "of the present day",¹⁰ capable of expressing life's exuberance and vitality in direct, everyday words. After publishing their

⁹ For the most influential Polish analysis of the Skamander group see Janusz Stradecki, *W kręgu Skamandra* (Around Skamander), Warszawa 1977.

¹⁰ "Słowo Wstępne" (Introduction), in: *Skamander*, 1, 1920, 5.

work in the journals *Pro Arte* and *Pro Arte et Studio* during the war, they launched their own periodical, *Skamander*, in 1920. The first issue opened with their manifesto, followed by the young Jan Lechoń's farce *Pani Walewska* and other poetry, prose, and criticism. *Pani Walewska* is a clever mosaic of disjointed vignettes that make fun of Romantic literary conventions, national messianism, and Polish historical preoccupations. In the final scene Oscar Wilde encounters Róża Weneda, a mythological Polish heroine familiar to Polish audiences from a play by Mickiewicz's younger contemporary Juliusz Słowacki.¹¹ During his stay at Weneda's countryside manor, Wilde gets accused of sexual impropriety and as he parries the accusations made against him, Weneda interrupts:

Do not talk so much,
Only remember, that we have a different order
and different customs here, that here at the manor,
for nine centuries...

In turn, Wilde interrupts:

Nine! My God!
Nine centuries of backwaters, nine hundred years
of provincial, parochial, petty bourgeois, putrid rot,
and you stick a wick into all this, and then burn this lamp
before an icon, and you praise God
with your reeking morality. From this fatherland,
for nothing but your whims, fantasies, and desires,
you've forged golden handcuffs for humanity
that inhabits Poland.¹²

He then exclaims that Poland has called itself the Christ of Nations, nailed itself to a cross and now pierces its own side with images of death and history to keep from falling asleep. This impoverished, pathetic concept of life, he says, would provoke nothing but mocking laughter and derisive screams from European audiences.

One cannot deny that this imagery suggests a violent dismissal of partitions-era Polish culture, and it draws a sharp juxtaposition between backward Poland and advanced Europe. The juxtaposition is subtly undermined, however, by several nuances of the scene, and by other scenes in the play. Wilde's evocation of a laughing, mocking Europe brings the reader back to an earlier scene where Weneda herself told a

¹¹ The play was Słowacki's *Lilla Weneda*, first published in Paris in 1840.

¹² Jan Lechoń, "Pani Walewska" (Lady Walewska), in: *Skamander*, 1, 1920, 6-18, here 18.

Polish historian that Poland is so blinded by its history that it is unable to join contemporary Europe. Weneda's image of Poland was one of a queen, so proud of her long-gone days of glory that she closes her eyes to contemplate her past as she steps into the modern world. This self-absorbed oblivion does not serve her well – she strays into the fields and tramples patches of cabbage, provoking empty laughter among the partitioning powers and thunderous laughter in European capitals.¹³

This geographic differentiation of Europe's laughter immediately complicates the simple contrast between advanced, superior Europe and backwaters Poland suggested so strongly in Wilde's speech. Significantly, neither the European capitals nor the partitioning powers laugh with joy or innocent playfulness; their laughter is either empty or thunderous, suggesting that the uncomfortable connection between laughter and shame is ubiquitous on the continent. As Lechoń grapples with shame about Poland's political weakness and subsequent cultural martyrology, he also imagines that Europe is not quite comfortable with its superiority – laughing, perhaps, to drown out echoes of guilt. A laughing Europe, moreover, is condescending, but not indifferent. The mockery is meant to embarrass Poland into overcoming its attachment to history so that it can join an imagined European modernity – the potential for a more meaningful dialogue thus hides in the ambiguity of laughter.

It was, of course, not Europe but Lechoń and his readers who laughed or smiled when they read this parody of the ossified schemas that came to define Polish culture. Self-parody and biting political satire was actually quite common among the Skamanders and the futurists who saw public, self-confident laughter as the best antidote to the culture of martyrological exultation. Most of the time they made fun of each other, they mocked inept politicians, and ridiculed outworn Romantic tropes – larchwood manors, valiant hussars, the famous *Książę Józef* and the like. In the Polish cultural context, more than manifestos and formal proclamations, such laughter frayed the threads that held ethical and aesthetic endeavors together. In *Pani Walewska* Lechoń took this jesting still further by bringing Europe out to laugh at Poland, thus giving much greater 'seriousness' to the laughter. In the face of an amused, laughing Europe, solemn glorification of Polish national virtues was unmasked as helpless – only radically new art could silence Europe's laughter and transform it into genuine curiosity.

Finally, Lechoń's choice of Oscar Wilde as Europe's spokesman works strongly to soften the sharp opposition between Poland and

¹³ Jan Lechoń, "Pani Walewska", 8.

Europe. It turns the reader's attention to England at the fin-de-siècle, when apocalyptic expectations and images of Europe's decline and death reverberated throughout the western intellectual world. Lechoń thus ridiculed Polish national messianism while at the same time reminding his readers that Europe, too, experienced its own period of malaise and decadent fascination with death.

Crumbs from Europe's Table

Despite their sometimes sharp attacks against traditional Polish culture, by the mid-1920s Lechoń and the Skamander poets enjoyed the support of large and admiring audiences in Warsaw and throughout Poland. In contrast, Polish futurism was a very short-lived and bittersweet phenomenon. In 1920 Aleksander Wat and Anatol Stern published *Gga. The First Almanac of Polish Futurism*, where they represented themselves as primitivists addressing Poland and the world. By 1923 Bruno Jasieński was writing futurism's obituaries. Like Marinetti, Polish futurists waged militant campaigns to 'liberate' words from meaning and syntax, like the Zurich dadaists they indulged in reveries of whimsy and the absurd, and like Mayakovski and the Moscow futurists they wanted the new poetry to be performed on the streets for urban crowds and factory workers. Polish futurism, more than any of the other modernist movements of the early 20s brought concerns about aesthetic imitation into sharp focus in public debates. Żeromski attacked the imitative tendencies of Polish futurists in his 1922 polemic *Snobbery and Progress*, which portrayed them as having a parrot-like relationship to Europe and indulging in experimental forms and gestures that had no meaning or resonance in the context of the Polish language and culture.¹⁴ The concern was not Żeromski's alone, and both literary critics and the young innovators themselves often worried that in turning away from partitions-era tropes, Polish literature would simply turn to contemporary European ones, just as rigid and stifling to creativity, even if 'universal' in their appeal.

In a 1921 *Manifesto regarding the immediate futurization of life* Jasieński portrayed the Polish futurists as people with "large lungs and strong shoulders" and called out to his contemporaries:

the insipid sents of your yesterday's mesianism make us sneez; we ofer you the only, nu, kontemporary, and wild mesianism. If you do not wish to be the last

¹⁴ Stefan Żeromski, *Snobizm i Postęp* (Snobbery and Progress), Kielce 1996, 9.

nashion in Urope, but on the kontrary, the first, stop feeding on the skraps from the kichen of the West (we can offer our own menu), and in the great race of civilizashions, move toward the finish line with short, synthetic steps.¹⁵

Polish readers were thus offered images of the new Polish artists' strength and youth, clothed in the rather unwieldy, "logically reformed" Polish futurist spelling. The passage simultaneously warned against a servile, imitative attitude toward the West, though Jasieński might not have realized the irony of using the French word *menu* instead of the Polish *jadłospis* to suggest that Poles have a unique reservoir of artistic capacities of their own. Those who were familiar with Lechoń's *Pani Walewska* probably also noticed a striking similarity between Jasieński's passage and an image that appears toward the end of Oscar Wilde's tirade against Polish provincialism:

You eat every crumb that falls from our table
your own music you do not wish to play,
and other music you play with no skill!¹⁶

In both passages Europeans are sophisticated and active, while Poles are crude and passive, waiting for what falls down, or for what might be left over. The image of animal-like, primitive Poles, dependent on Europe for nourishment, epitomizes fears about cultural inferiority that were almost palpable in the early years after the partitions. The portrayal of Poles as eating crumbs from Europe's table is far indeed from Polish national messianic imagery, which, significantly, Jasieński still felt compelled to attack in his manifesto.

Chaos and Radical Choices

Another centrally important aspect of Polish interwar modernism was the imagery related to the immense cultural crisis that gripped the continent after the Great War. The unprecedented social and psychological damage inflicted by trench warfare left European cultural norms open to attacks, and, for many Western writers, put into question the very idea that

¹⁵ Bruno Jasieński, "Do Narodu Polskiego, Manifest w sprawie natychmiastowej futuryzacji życia" (To the Polish Nation, a Manifesto concerning the imediate futurization of life), in: Zbigniew Jarosiński and Helena Zaworska (eds.), *Antologia Polskiego Futuryzmu i Nowej Sztuki* (An Anthology of Polish Futurism and New Art), Warszawa 1978, 7-17, here 9, my translation.

¹⁶ Lechoń, "Pani Walewska", 18.

Europe could provide cultural or literary models for anyone. One only needs to recall William Butler Yeats' *Second Coming* or Abel Gance's *J'Accuse* to remember how strongly disillusion and despair reverberated through Western Europe when the dead and the wounded began their journeys home.¹⁷ In Europe's cultural centers these somber calls for self-examination coexisted with the exaggerated joy of cabaret revues and jazz concerts. In Poland, the elation of national independence dominated both literary and political discourse in the early months after 1918, but with time the initially isolated critical reflections about the war gained an increasingly prominent role in public discussions.¹⁸

The young Skamanders, futurists, and formists were among the first to write about the cultural crisis brought about by the war, and Antoni Słonimski's 1919 *Czarna Wiosna* remains one of the most powerful expressions of humanitarian pacifism in Polish literature.¹⁹ In the opening passage of the already cited *Manifesto regarding the immediate futurization of life* Jasieński argued that in addition to causing huge geographical and social dislocations, the war brought about unprecedented shifts in European values.²⁰ He claimed further that the resulting cultural crisis, perceptible in Europe's East and West, registered with particular intensity in Poland because Poland's cultural development had been stifled by the partitions:

We have been a museum-nashion long enough, producing nothing but mummies and reliks. Today, the wild untamable presses in at all our doors and windows, it screams, entreats, demands. If we are not kapable of kreating nu kategories to kontayn it, nu art in which it kould sing out, we will not surviv.²¹

Partitions-era values are thus again shown as helpless – this time not against Europe's laughter but against the seismic shifts in European culture. The text warns Polish artists that if they do not create radically new art, new language, and new philosophical foundations, the still fragile Polish cultural independence will be submerged in the surrounding chaos. For Jasieński the war simplified cultural choices: one had to either

¹⁷ For an especially interesting interpretation see J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European cultural history*, New York 1995.

¹⁸ For a discussion of Polish World War I poetry, see Maria Olszewska, *Człowiek w świecie Wielkiej Wojny: literatura polska z lat 1914-1919 wobec I wojny światowej: wybrane zagadnienia* (Man in the world of the Great War: Polish literature and World War I, 1914-1919 – selected issues), Warszawa 2004.

¹⁹ Antoni Słonimski, *Czarna Wiosna* (Black Spring), Warszawa 1919.

²⁰ Jasieński, „Do Narodu Polskiego”, 7.

²¹ Jasieński, „Do Narodu Polskiego”, 8.

innovate or die, and the futurists would not be caught dead succumbing to martyrological longings:

We folow Bżozowski and announce a grayt sale of old junk. Old tradishions, kategorees, habits, drawings, and fetishes are getting sold. The grayt all-nashional panoptikon in wawel. We will weelbarow the stale mummies of mickiewiczzes and slowackis from skuares, greens and streets. It is time to empty the pedestals, cleer out the skuares, mayk room for those who are koming.²²

In this context Jasiński's spelling reform has a new significance. It is no longer simply a game, a trick to surprise the reader and magnify her attention by drawing it closer to the text. It is an assertion of order against chaos. However arbitrary Jasiński's spelling appeared on the printed page, the driving idea behind it was to simplify what he saw as arcane and outdated spelling conventions, remove phonetic doubles that represented a single sound, and make each spelling rule logically compelling.²³ He wanted the Polish language and membership in Polish culture to make sense at a time when Poland was no longer defined by partitions but not yet defined by independence.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Jasiński's manifesto and of the works of Polish avant-garde writers more generally, is that awareness of the destruction of European cultural norms by the Great War did little to assuage their fears and concerns about imitating Europe in their new art. One might expect that the collapse of the European cultural paradigm would have given them greater confidence in turning toward local culture as a source of new values and literary norms. Local culture, however, appeared to them so tainted by the legacy of national messianism that they often dismissed its less obvious symbolic registers. Interestingly, it was Żeromski who defined progress in Polish literature in terms of turning not to Europe but to the yet undiscovered resources of Polish culture, regional dialects, and folk tales. If Polish literature is to develop a modern identity, he argued, it should explore the linguistic nuances of the many Polish dialects, and bring out universal elements of folk tales and legends through contemporary staging and narrative techniques.²⁴

²² Jasiński, „*Do Narodu Polskiego*”, 9.

²³ See Bruno Jasiński, “Manifest w sprawie ortografii fonetycznej” (A Manifesto regarding phonetic orthography), in: Jaroński & Zaworska (eds.), *Antologia Polskiego Futuryzmu*, 24-7, here 24-5.

²⁴ Żeromski, *Snobizm i Postęp*, 99-168.

A Dionysian Feast

Anatol Stern was among the few Polish avant-garde poets who forcefully pushed aside concerns about inferiority and imitation, and his assertion of the new power of Polish literature in his famous *Europa* is one of the most interesting and complex Polish poems of the 1920s. Co-author of the first futurist almanac, Stern was a central player in the provocative readings and happenings that took place on Warsaw's streets in the early months of independence. Along with Wat, Tuwim, and Słonimski he was among Poland's assimilated Jewish writers who were fully accepted neither by ethnic Poles nor by observant Jews. In 1920 and 1921 he and Wat had led the campaign to set words free from syntax and social responsibility, but in 1927 he announced a radically new direction in his art in a small book of poems entitled *Race to the Pole*.²⁵ The book opened not with a preface but a *Confession*, in which Stern announced that his earlier approach to aesthetics, including his borrowings from abroad, was a useless farce, a circus performance for bored intelligentsia. His experiences in the 1920s, his synthesis of Marxist and Catholic beliefs, and above all his observations of Warsaw's starving crowds of unemployed workers led him to assert that poetry which did not speak on behalf of the oppressed was worth nothing.²⁶

Europa was among the most dynamic poems in *Race to the Pole*, and Stern called it an outcry against the brutalizing effects of modern industrial labor.²⁷ It certainly is a revolutionary poem of outrage against injustice, but it is also a fascinating new reconfiguration of the Polish artist's relationship to both Poland and Europe. It is a fast-paced, dithyrambic whirlwind of images that convey the disorientation and the quickly changing demands and attacks on the senses that punctuate city life. The poem's dominant imagery is that of food and hunger – workers with hollowed out stomachs are fed tapeworms of newspapers and bacilli of words instead of meat; overfed with propaganda and poisoned like rats, their only regret is that they are not rats who could bite the hands that feed them lies. The crescendo of exploitation and frustration culminates in a Dionysian feast of Maenads who are released by a blade of grass onto the bleating “herd of Parises, Warsaws, Lisbons, Londons” to bite into the outstretched backs of churches and columns of the financial exchange. They disperse the frightened crowds of cities with the movements of their

²⁵ Anatol Stern, *Bieg do Bieguna* (Race to the Pole), Warszawa 1927.

²⁶ Stern, *Bieg do Bieguna*, 8-9.

²⁷ Stern, *Bieg do Bieguna*, 13.

hips and “appease their hunger on the fatted flesh of Europe”.²⁸ When the feast is over and the revolution complete, the poet turns to himself:

I am covered with a billion mouths
with an organized proletariat of cells
a rebellion of gullets

This swarm of raging bacchantes
is one centimeter of my skin.²⁹

And in this fusion with the exploited crowds of 20th-century Europe, Stern’s lyrical voice comes eerily close to what is perhaps the archetypal symbolic fusion between the poet and great crowds in Polish literature – Konrad’s exclamation in Part III of Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve*:

My name is Million
For I love and I suffer for millions.³⁰

Mickiewicz wrote these lines in Dresden in 1832, and the so-called *Great Improvisation* to which they belong is one of the best known passages in Polish Romantic literature. It was there that Mickiewicz most forcefully articulated the heroic mission of the poet in the quest for Polish independence, and it was only a few scenes later that he put forward his first articulation of national messianism. Stern’s turn toward politically committed literature thus brought him into a new implicit dialogue with Polish Romanticism, but it also revealed new confidence that became accessible to Polish writers after 1918. Mickiewicz’s symbolism glorified self-sacrifice whereas Stern represented the poet as a destroyer and creator of worlds. Stern’s poet was powerful enough to engulf and destroy Europe, to digest whatever it had to offer and use the energy gained from the sickening feast to create a new order.³¹ *Europa* thus bears witness to the dynamism and vitality that characterized Polish experimental literature in the 1920s. Ultimately *Europa*’s most fascinating quality, however, is the way in which it balances and reflects the various tensions and challenges

²⁸ Stern, *Bieg do Bieguna*, 64, the cited phrase is from the Themerson translation, *Europa: a poem*, London 1962.

²⁹ Stern, *Bieg do Bieguna*, 65, my translation.

³⁰ Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady, część trzecia* (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III), Kraków 1947, 44, my translation.

³¹ For a collective biography of Polish futurists and reflections about the shift from non-committed to politically engaged literature see Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism*, New Haven 2006.

that attended modernist innovation in Poland during this time. It rejects nationalist preoccupations without completely turning away from the powerful symbolic echoes of Polish Romanticism, it reveals both confidence and concern about the survival of Western civilization, and it shows the Polish artist as belonging to Europe and standing apart from it.

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[illegible]

In programmatischer Absicht wird hier das traditionelle Verhältnis von Zentrum und Peripherie umgekehrt: die Inseln der Südsee rücken in den Mittelpunkt, umgeben von Mexiko und Alaska, China und Russland. Ein reduziertes Europa findet sich am äußersten westlichen Rand. Kontinentaleuropa endet bei Paris. Westlicher Außenposten ist Irland, neben

einem verschwindend kleinen England. Das mediterrane Europa existiert auf dieser Karte überhaupt nicht, und damit auch nicht das Land, um das es im Folgenden gehen soll: Spanien.

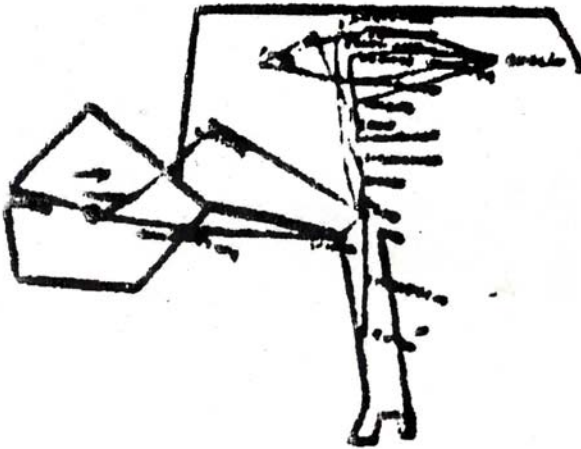


Fig. 15: Karte, die das westliche Süd- und Mitteleuropa zeigt, in: *La Gaceta Literaria* (15.7.1928).

Im Vergleich zur Weltkarte nimmt sich diese zweite Karte, die das westliche Süd- und Mitteleuropa zeigt, zunächst eher konventionell aus. Doch auch sie illustriert eine De- oder Re-Zentrierung, einen Aufstand der Peripherie gegen das Zentrum, des Südens gegen den Norden.

Im Jahre 1928 unternimmt der spanische Avantgardist Ernesto Giménez Caballero (1899-1988)¹, Herausgeber der Kulturzeitschrift *La Gaceta Literaria* (1927-1932)², eine Vortrags- und Erkundungsreise nach Belgien, Holland, Deutschland und Italien. Über die künstlerische Aktualität in den von ihm besuchten europäischen Metropolen berichtet er für seine Zeitschrift unter den Schlagworten „Europa: Conferencias: Raid – 12.302 kms. Literatura“ in mehreren Reportagen, die ein Jahr

¹ Vgl. Enrique Selva Roca de Togores, *Ernesto Giménez Caballero. Entre vanguardia y fascismo*, Valencia 2000; zum literarischen Kontext der präfaschistischen Avantgarde in Spanien vgl. Vfin., *Avantgarde und Faschismus. Spanische Erzählprosa 1925-1940*, Tübingen 1996; spanische Übersetzung: *Vanguardistas de camisa azul. La trayectoria de los escritores Tomás Borrás, Felipe Ximénez de Sandoval, Samuel Ros y Antonio de Obregón entre 1925 y 1940*, Madrid 2003.

² *La Gaceta Literaria* (Madrid 1927-1932), Faksimile Vadiz 1980.

später, 1929, und ergänzt um zwei Kapitel zu Portugal und Frankreich, unter dem Titel *Círculo imperial* in Buchform erscheinen³.

Die vorliegende Karte veranschaulicht die besagten 12.302 km. Literatur, die Reiseroute jenes avantgardistischen „Raids“, der das alte Europa ausradieren will. Denn im Vorwort zu seinem Reisebericht dekonstruiert Giménez Caballero den Mythos Europa, „máximo mito de la España moderna“ (17), unter Berufung auf Italien und Russland, die ebenfalls den Sirenenklängen Kontinentaleuropas erlegen seien, diesen Zauber aber zwischenzeitlich gebrochen hätten: „Algo muy semejante a lo ocurrido en Italia y Rusia con esta misma sirena continental“. Vergleiche man die jüngste Geschichte dieser drei „países periféricos del núcleo europeo“, so treten dabei erstaunliche Parallelen in der kulturellen Entwicklung zu Tage, deren gemeinsamer Nenner eine heftige Kehrtwendung *gegen* Europa sei, in der sich beispielsweise Unamuno, Malaparte und Florenski einig seien: „No existe cosa más sorprendente que homologar la historia moderna de estos tres países periféricos del núcleo europeo para encontrarse fenómenos culturales de igual aspecto: personas, libros, pasiones“ (17). An der Peripherie Europas wisse sich die Jugend der Nachkriegszeit vereint im avantgardistischen, genauer gesagt: futuristischen Gestus der Zerstörung – „una revolución, un higiénico entusiasmo destructor y afirmativo“ (18) –, dessen politisches Ziel ein neues, ein anderes, ein totalitäres Europa sei. An den Rändern Europas haben Russland und Italien durch ihre kommunistische bzw. faschistische ‚Revolution‘ einen radikalen Bruch mit den europäischen Traditionen des bürgerlichen Individualismus, des Liberalismus und der Demokratie vollzogen und ein neues Europa geschaffen, dem künftig auch Spanien angehören solle:

Frente a la obsesión ¡„Europa“! De estos terribles cincuenta años, tanto el uno como el otro país cortaron por lo sano: el mejor modo de ser europeos es ponerse frente a esa tradicional Europa y dar una nota original. Comunismo, Fascismo. En el fondo, dos fórmulas fascinadoras de una nueva Europa, de otra Europa. Quizá: de otra cosa que Europa. Si por Europa la vieja se entiende lo que entendieron rusos e italianos: reformismo, criticismo, democracia, liberalismo, burguesía, *laissez faire* del individuo. (17-18)

³ In der Ausgabe der *Gaceta Literaria* vom 15. Juli 1928 findet sich die Ankündigung mit dem programmatischen Vorspann; in drei Folgen widmet er sich der italienischen Etappe (1.8., 15.8., 1.9.), im Heft vom 1. September sind die Niederlande an der Reihe, während Deutschland wiederum drei Nummern umfasst (15.9., 1.10., 15.10.) und Belgien am 15. November 1928 den Abschluss des Reiseberichts bildet. Bis auf wenige Texte, die nicht in die Buchausgabe aufgenommen wurden, zitieren wir hier nach dieser (Seitenangaben in Klammern): Ernesto Giménez Caballero, *Círculo imperial*, Madrid 1929.

Seine kulturgeographische Neuordnung Europas setzt Giménez Caballero, den *spatial turn* vorwegnehmend⁴, in Beziehung zum epochalen Wechsel vom Zeit- zum Raumparadigma: „Se ha dicho que el nuestro es el siglo de la Geografía. Frente al no nuestro – o pasado – de la Historia“ (13). Der Reisebericht *Circuito imperial* aus dem Sommer 1928 spiegelt darüber hinaus den Übergang von der künstlerischen zur politischen Avantgarde. In seinem ‚tour d’horizon‘ der avancierten zeitgenössischen Kunst in Europa verknüpft Giménez Caballero den Diskurs der ästhetischen Avantgarde mit dem Diskurs einer – faschistisch verstandenen – politischen Avantgarde, um eine radikale Alternative zu Alteuropa zu entwerfen. Die Vortragsreise wird dabei stilisiert zu einer rhetorisch-sportlich-erotischen Eroberung Europas durch Gecé, den „Mannschaftsführer der neuen spanischen Literatur“, „capitán del equipo de la nueva literatura española“ (GL, 1.7.1928).

Im Folgenden soll zunächst ein Rückblick auf das historische Verhältnis zwischen Spanien und Europa sowie auf Giménez Caballeros frühere Europa-Orientierung im Sinne der Generation von 1898 gegeben werden, um anschließend die in *Circuito imperial* zelebrierte Zugehörigkeit Spaniens zu den internationalen Avantgarden als eine Form europäischer Integration zu betrachten. Eine erste wertende Differenzierung zwischen dem Norden und Süden Europas lässt sich sodann im Bereich der Architektur und des Sports beobachten, wo eine mediterran-vitalistische Kultur als Erbe des Hellenismus zur eigentlichen Avantgarde erhoben und einem inauthentischen Norden entgegengestellt wird. An Rom schließlich macht sich die Bekehrung zum Faschismus fest, der als neue Latinität verstanden wird und den (politischen) Aufstand der Peripherie gegen das Zentrum artikuliert.

Spanien und Europa

Mit dem Titel des Reiseberichts – *Circuito imperial* – wird sogleich die historische Dimension im Verhältnis zwischen Spanien und Europa aufgerufen, nämlich jene Epoche der Frühen Neuzeit, in der Spanien als Weltmacht das restliche Europa dominierte. In die Tradition jenes ‚glorreichen‘ Imperiums, das Europa seinen Stempel aufgedrückt hat, stellt sich der Reisende, wenn er auf dessen Spuren wandelt: „Herederó espiritual de una España activa y forjadora –, ha recorrido un sector de Europa

⁴ Zur Raumkonzeption Giménez Caballeros vgl. Nil Santiáñez, „Mirada cartográfica y voluntad-de-arquitectura en la obra fascista de Ernesto Giménez Caballero“, in: *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 3, 2007, 325–47.

para revivir estas huellas imperiales, de convivencias seculares y magníficas“ (9). Zugleich ist ihm jedoch bewusst, dass diese ‚großartige‘ Interkulturalität keineswegs reziprok war, sondern vielmehr auf einem Dominanzverhältnis beruhte, das, verschärft durch die konfessionellen Konflikte, zu einem jahrhundertelangen Zerwürfnis zwischen Spanien und Europa führte: „Desde la Reforma, España había perdido el don del saludo y del abrazo europeo“ (9). Insofern wecken die Toponyme Flandern, Portugal, Rom und Münster sehr zwiespältige historische Assoziationen. Auf den „blutigen und harten“ Spuren des früheren Weltreichs sucht Gecé 1928 die Wiederannäherung an Europa, wobei er zwischen dem machtvollen „materiellen Imperium“ von einst und dem nurmehr rein sprachlich-ideellen Konzept einer „España de espíritu“ unterscheidet. Auf dem offensichtlichen Kontrast zwischen diesen beiden historischen Erscheinungsformen Spaniens in seinem Bezug zu Europa beruhe die Ironie des Titels *Círculo imperial*:

Flandes, Portugal, Roma, Münster. Palabras donde dejó su huella sangrienta y dura nuestro imperio material. Palabras por donde hoy vuela sin embargo, etéreo, el recuerdo de España. La España de espíritu. La España purificada y egregia, que nace, que está hoy naciendo.

Que la noble ironía de este libro: „Círculo imperial“ – andanzas sin más armas imperiales que hablar español de España – sea comprendida, en todo su alcance exacto. (10)

Der Europa-Reise des Avantgardisten sind die nationale Identitätskrise von 1898 und die in deren Umfeld unternommene kritische Revision des Verhältnisses zwischen Spanien und Europa⁵ noch deutlich eingeschrieben. Zurückgehend bis zu Juan Valeras Gleichung „Europa = España“ (15) skizziert er das zwischen „Import“ und „Export“ oszillierende Verhältnis Spaniens zu Europa in der Generation von 1898, in der darauf folgenden Gruppe um Ortega y Gasset bis zu seinen eigenen Zeitgenossen, für die es an der Zeit sei, „den Faden wieder aufzunehmen“ und an die historische Präsenz der spanischen Kultur in Europa anzuknüpfen (vgl. 15-6). Als selbsternannter „Enkel der Generation von 1898“⁶ teilt Giménez Caballero zunächst deren Bemühen um die Modernisierung Spaniens durch die Orientierung am Leitbild Europas. Verstärkt wird diese Ten-

⁵ Vgl. die Standardwerke von Hans Hinterhäuser (Hrsg.), *Spanien und Europa. Stimmen zu ihrem Verhältnis von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*, München 1983; und Martin Franzbach, *Spaniens Hinwendung zu Europa*, Darmstadt 1988.

⁶ Vgl. Michael Scotti-Rosin, „Ernesto Giménez Caballero ‘nieto del 98’. Ein Beitrag zur neueren spanischen Ideologieggeschichte“, in: Gerhard Schmidt & Manfred Tietz (Hrsg.), *Stimmen der Romania. Festschrift für W.Th. Elwert*, Wiesbaden 1980, 405-20.

denz durch zwei Aufenthalte in Straßburg, wo er 1920/21 und 1923/24 als Spanisch-Lektor tätig ist. Durchdrungen von mystischem Germanentum, sucht er am Rhein „das Europäische“, jenes „Ferment“ eines kritischen, liberalen und wissenschaftlichen Geistes, das Spanien entscheidende Impulse zur Modernisierung verleihen könnte. Wie seine Artikel und Reiseberichte aus jener Zeit jedoch zeigen, gibt er dieses Vorhaben bald auf, überzeugt von der Unmöglichkeit eines solchen Kulturtransfers sowie von der unausweichlichen Inferiorität Spaniens. In einem Brief an Miguel de Unamuno aus dem Jahre 1923 erläutert er seine Skepsis gegenüber diesem europäischen Ferment, dem er ein Buchprojekt widmet: „Modesto heredero de nuestros europeizantes que, desde Nebrija, intentan renovarnos con la levadura ajena. Sin embargo, creo que mi generación representa ya el estadio de sonreírse del ‘fermento’ sin dejar de rendirle tributo“⁷. Während seines zweiten Straßburg-Aufenthaltes 1923/24, d.h. vier Jahre vor seinem *Circuito imperial*, hat sich das europäische Ideal bereits weitgehend verflüchtigt, nicht zuletzt durch eine nationalistische Wende infolge seiner Teilnahme am Marokko-Krieg: „el fermento sería también el proceso de descomposición del ideal europeísta en el propio pensamiento del escritor, al confrontar su aspiración a la conquista de la cultura y la ciencia europeas con el nacionalismo político que había adoptado a raíz de su servicio militar en Marruecos. El nacionalismo político acaba por invadir también sus concepciones culturales“⁸.

Trotz dieser Europa-Skepsis flammt anlässlich der Vortragsreise von 1928 noch einmal eine gewisse Euphorie auf. Unter dem Zeichen der Avantgarde scheint die kulturelle Integration Spaniens in Europa zu gelingen - zumindest wird es von Gecé in diesem Sinne stilisiert, hatte sich doch die *Gaceta Literaria* durch ihren Untertitel „ibérica, americana, internacional“ eine internationalistische Mission zu eigen gemacht. Während sich das Ideal des „iberismo“ im Verhältnis zwischen Spanien und Portugal verwirklichen sollte⁹, beinhaltet das Postulat des Internationalismus die interkulturellen Kontakte mit dem übrigen Europa, wie sie die Generation von 1898 initiiert hatte: „ansia [...] de acercamiento al resto de los países europeos, de intervención en sus culturas, de intercambio intelectual“ (17). In diesem Sinne sei es der größte Erfolg der *Gaceta Literaria*, das Europa-Streben früherer Generationen verwirklicht zu

⁷ Zitiert bei Selva Roca de Togores, *Ernesto Giménez Caballero*, 58.

⁸ Selva Roca de Togores, *Ernesto Giménez Caballero*, 59.

⁹ In der Definition des „iberismo“ zeigt sich eine deutliche Abgrenzung zwischen Norden und Süden: „la lucha contra dos enemigos: el interno, los odios e ignorancias mutuas; el externo, Inglaterra“ (26).

haben und sich am Kulturaustausch der europäischen Avantgarden ‚auf gleicher Augenhöhe‘ zu beteiligen:

Este es el éxito mayor entre los obtenidos por *La Gaceta Literaria*: la incorporación a Europa. Lo que había sido aspiración o ideal casi inaccesible de otras generaciones y revistas, lo ha conseguido *La Gaceta Literaria*. Y lo ha conseguido sin humillaciones serviles, sin renunciar a nada de lo espontáneo que pudiera tener la juventud española, y sin entonar el ‘mea culpa’ de las generaciones anteriores. (GL, 1.7.28)

Das Ausland seinerseits erkenne mit Interesse und Bewunderung die Leistung der spanischen Avantgarde an, repräsentiert durch die *Gaceta Literaria*, welche „die Aufmerksamkeit und das Interesse aller europäischen Zentren geweckt hat, in denen die Strömungen der literarischen Avantgarde entstehen und genau beobachtet werden“.

La Gaceta Literaria, con poco más de un año de existencia, ha conseguido llamar la atención y despertar el interés de todos los centros europeos donde se producen y siguen cuidadosamente los movimientos de vanguardia literaria [...]. Italia, Holanda, Alemania, Bélgica y Francia, es decir, los países de terreno artístico más abonado, ofrecen sus cátedras, abren sus salas de conferencias al capitán del equipo de la nueva literatura española. (GL, 1.7.28)

Die *Gaceta Literaria* genieße in Europa „un gran crédito de prestigio“,¹⁰ ihrem Herausgeber begegne man in einer „atmósfera cordial de simpatía personal“ (GL, 15.6.1928). Zu guter Letzt wird die Vortragsreise Giménez Caballeros der Verleihung der europäischen Bürgerrechte gleichgesetzt: „Es la ‘alternativa’ de España, la carta de ciudadanía que Europa nos da, por la que se nos conceden los mismos derechos, y se nos equipara a los demás países“ (GL, 1.7.28).

Die Avantgarde als Medium europäischer Integration

In der Tat bildet die Avantgarde für Giménez Caballero ein Medium nicht allein europäischer, sondern vielmehr kosmopolitischer Integration, das jenseits aller nationalen, politischen oder ethnischen Grenzen eine „brüderliche Kette der Gemeinsamkeiten und der Begeisterung“ schafft:

¹⁰ Vgl. „Desde lejos – fuera de España y un poco en contraste – se ve con más evidencia la importancia cultural de nuestra revista“ (GL, 15.6.1928).

La nueva literatura – Cultura – de todos los países está dando una más amplia significación al sentido cosmopolita. Por encima de todo – de fronteras, de política, de razas – la nueva literatura está creando una cadena fraternal, de afinidades, de entusiasmos. La *juventud* literaria de todos los países está unida – como la *juventud* de los estadios – por hurras de simpatía generosa. (GL, 15.6.1928)

Die Avantgarde ist eine Bewegung der Jugend¹¹, die ein hoch emotionales Klima der Solidarität schafft, ein „ambiente de camaradería y de entusiasmo“ (GL, 15.6.1928).

Mit den futuristischen und surrealistischen Avantgarden teilt Giménez Caballero eine antipassatistische Haltung, die er gleich zu Beginn seiner Reise betont: „a mí no me interesaba ver ciudad, hacer turismo, enterarme de ninguna forma monumental“ (40). Das schönste Denkmal von Köln ist von daher selbstverständlich der Hauptbahnhof, neben dem der Dom wie ein weiterer Bahnhof wirkt – für Luftschiffe (98). Florenz und Venedig vergleicht er mit ebenso museal-verschlafenen Orten in Spanien wie Toledo, Talavera oder Valladolid (45). Ihr historisches Erbe dienen sie den vorwiegend angelsächsischen Touristen mit kommerziellem Aufputz an: Rouge auf Falten – „Tienen colorete sobre arrugas“ (45). Gecé lastet dies dem bürgerlichen 19. Jahrhundert an, welches die sakrale Dimension des Ästhetischen zerstört und die Wallfahrt zu den Weihestätten der Kunst durch das Museum und den Massentourismus ersetzt habe: „El siglo XIX intentó suprimir el santuario y la peregrinación, sustituyéndolos con el museo y el turismo“ (47). Im Unterschied zum Verwesungsgeruch der toten Baedeker-Städte Florenz und Venedig ist Mailand eine pulsierende Industriestadt. Dank ihrer kosmopolitischen Dynamik ist sie auch das Zentrum der italienischen Avantgarde, Geburtsort des Futurismus¹² und mit dem Kulturzentrum *Il Convegno*, der Zeitschrift *La Fiera letteraria* und dem Künstlercafé Bagutta erstes Reiseziel des spanischen Avantgardisten:

Esa fetidez que se siente en Florencia y en Venecia procede de la putrefacción de tantas admiraciones insinceras, banales, transeúntes, de tanta pólvora en salvas quemada en el fusil del Baedeker.

En cambio, la gracia cosmopolita de Milán es vital, auténtica, directa. Produce automóviles de marca universal y necesaria. Produce literatura alegre de dancin y sport, [...]. El futurismo – maquinístico, exaltado, intercontinental – salió de un corso milanés. (41)

¹¹ Vgl. Gecé und die *Gaceta Literaria* werden im Ausland empfangen „como representante, el uno, de la juventud española, y como el órgano de la nueva literatura, el otro“ (GL, 1.7.28).

¹² Es verwundert nicht, dass auch der italienische Faschismus – laut Gecé – von Mailand seinen Ausgang nahm: „Todo Milán es puerta: [...] De Milán procede la arrancada del gol fascista, el gran chutamiento hasta la otra portería, hasta el otro campo enemigo“ (40).

Das Café Bagutta ist ein Hort der internationalen Avantgarden, in dem sich Giménez Caballero genauso heimisch fühlt wie im Madrider Café Pombo, wo Ramón Gómez de la Serna einen Literatenzirkel leitet. Hier wie dort haben sich vergleichbare Typen und Rituale einer avantgardistischen Alltagsästhetik ausgeprägt – von den Performance-artigen Banketten bis zu bestimmten „rites de passage“ für Gäste (vgl. 44). Doch im Unterschied zu dem hierarchisch auf Ramón ausgerichteten Kreis von Pombo wirkt Bagutta auf Gecé wie ein „demokratisch-föderales Parlament“, eine „kollektivistische“ Gesellschaft, deren heitere Soziabilität gelegentlich an eine „reunión alegre de loggia, o de fascio [!], e incluso de *gaudeamus germánico*“ erinnert (45).

Auch in Berlin findet Gecé Aufnahme im Geist der Avantgarden. Er besucht seine „literarischen Freunde“ in den Redaktionen des *Querschnitt* und der *Literarischen Welt*. Alfred Flechtheim führt ihn durch seine Galerie und zeigt ihm seine Schätze des Kubismus und Post-Kubismus: Vlaminck und Laurencin, Picasso, Braque und Juan Gris (81). Die Zeit des Expressionismus ist 1928 allerdings vorbei; Gecé konstatiert die „Umkehr der Subversion“, eine „reversión de la subversión“: „El fenómeno dinámico y revolucionario, la vanguardia literaria alemana, se ve que ha ido quedando un poco lejos. (Como en los demás países, por lo demás)“ (78). Stattdessen hat sich die „kalte Ordnung“ der Neuen Sachlichkeit etabliert: „Un orden sin fiebre. Un orden sereno. Clásico. Frío“ (79)¹³. Noch einmal evoziert er den „carácter moral, patético, *freudiano*“ der literarischen Revolte des Expressionismus, in deren Mittelpunkt der Vatermord steht, „la victoria del hijo contra el padre, del joven contra el viejo. De la horda moceril, que diría Freud“ (79). Dieser „rebeldía filial“ kommt übrigens Giménez Caballero selbst in seinen freudianisch geprägten Erzählungen aus *Yo, inspector de alcantarillas* (1928) nahe. Mit Bedauern, so ist nicht zuletzt angesichts der eingangs proklamierten sowjetisch-faschistischen Affinität zu vermuten, verabschiedet er die revolutionäre, pro-bolschewistische Phase der deutschen Avantgarde:

El expresionismo fué el verdadero padre del ‚Dämmerung‘, del ocaso. De la ‚Untergang‘, de la decadencia. Fué el impulsor del renacimiento ‘cósmico y asiático’ de los filósofos de la post-guerra y del entusiasmo por Rusia y las culturas lejanas de la Alemania inmediata de la post-guerra. Pero hoy todo eso se va ya viendo en declive, en remotez, en ‘footing’. (79)

¹³ Es verwundert allerdings, dass der Proto-Faschist diese „kalte Ordnung“ nicht weiter kommentiert.

Doch obwohl der Moment des Expressionismus vorüber ist, findet Gecé neue Anknüpfungspunkte zur deutschen Avantgarde, und zwar zum Kreis der Abstrakten um Kurt Schwitters, den er als *enfant terrible* porträtiert. In Hannover kennt man Giménez Caballero durch seine *Carteles literarios* (1927), literarische Plakate, auf denen er, als allegorische Landkarte oder Collage, Konstellationen und Repräsentanten der spanischen Avantgarde visualisiert. Bei den Hannoveraner Abstrakten erlebt er die eingangs erwähnte gleichberechtigte Integration im Geist der Avantgarde: „Alegoría de lo compañero y camarada. Conversaciones paralelas. Frases y opiniones, de manos en bolsillos“ (83). Im freundschaftlichen Gespräch stellen sie die Übereinstimmung ihrer künstlerischen Ideen fest, darunter das Konzept von Schema und Materie: „Mis teorías – que próximamente publicará el *Bauhaus*, de Dessau – les hicieron constatar cómo, una vez más, inquietudes paralelas son aprehendidas por diferentes meridianos y cómo pueden llegarse a resultados congruentes sin la menor intercomunicación. Nuestros puntos de vista coincidían en dos conceptos: *esquema y materia*. Pero diferían en el modo de tratarlos“ (85). Das konstruktivistisch-handwerkliche Kunstverständnis der Merz-Gruppe dürfte Gecé besonders imponiert haben, der in der Redaktion seiner *Gaceta Literaria* vorzugsweise im Mechaniker-Overall arbeitete. Er ist fasziniert vom Atelier Carl Buchheisters, das einem Ingenieurbüro ähnelt und wo nirgends das traditionelle Werkzeug des Malers zu finden ist: Leinwand und Pinsel:

Estos pintores le enseñaban a uno cuadros, como maestro albañil los planos de un edificio, como politécnico el esquema de una máquina. Todo: ritmo de líneas. Todo: armonía de formas. Todo: sinopsis pura. Música cerebral, delicia de intelecto. [...] Uno de estos pintores toma una línea matemática cualquiera (punto, esfera, recta, triángulo), y con ella en mano – solamente – parte en busca de todo un cuadro. (84)

Begeistert möchte er dieses Avantgarde-Strömung den „países mediterráneos“ zur Kenntnis bringen und versieht seine diesbezüglichen Ausführungen mit zahlreichen Illustrationen. Inmitten der Hannoveraner Abstrakten fühlt sich Giménez Caballero ganz in seinem Milieu und erläutert ihnen sein Verständnis vom kulturanthropologischen Kontext der internationalen Avantgarden: „pragmatismo, deporte, máquina, dictadura [!], desnudo, alegría: *materialismo transcendental*“ (86).

Süden vs. Norden

Doch gerade mit Bezug auf den Sport und die Nacktheit bzw. Körperlichkeit lässt sich im Reisebericht eine signifikante Distanzierung beobachten,

eine Ausgrenzung Nordeuropas aus dem vitalistischen Lebensgefühl der mediterranen Avantgarden. Die Olympischen Spiele in Amsterdam sind alles andere als ein Fest der Körper, so Giménez Caballero, da unter nördlichem Himmel das dionysische Moment fehlt:

¡Cómo el clima nórdico se subvierte – pero de manera repugnante – cuando quiere utilizar para sus fiestas la carne, la arena y el sol! Su embriaguez es deforme y mórbida, exagerada y brutal. Daba asco y fatiga aquella petulante tarde amsterdamesa.

En un Madrid – por ejemplo –, una tarde de toros es algo tan concentrado y puro como el delicioso mareo de un habano. El sol, al caer sobre la arena de la plaza y sobre los adoquines de las calles en marcha, excita vigores entrañables, potencialidades viscerales, que trasforma en algo sexual las horas, en algo tan rico, ardiente, febril y trémulo, que emborracha sin tambaleo apenas, como para poseer un sexo contrario, la garganta seca. (62)

Das Olympiastadion von Amsterdam, das er mit einer Zementfabrik vergleicht, wirft für Gecé „in aller Schärfe“ das „ungelöste Problem des griechischen Erbes in Europa“ auf:

Visité el stadium y me pareció visitar una fábrica de cemento. Estuve en su arena y me pareció estar sobre la transeúnte de un circo romántico de suburbio, en el que, ateridos, luchan leones y focas, negros, chinos y noruegos.

Todo el irresoluto problema de la herencia griega en Europa se me planteó con crudeza sobre el stadium olímpico de Amsterdam.

¿Qué es hoy Grecia? ¿Esto? ¿El pastiche cultural de estas razas germánicas o el abandono natural de estas otras de Mediodía? (62-3)

Der Speerwurf unter dem eisigen Regen Frieslands ist nichts als ein „pastiche cultural“, ein lächerliches, ja revoltierendes Simulakrum. Insofern die Olympiade von Amsterdam den Anlass gibt, die traditionelle Nord-Süd-Konfrontation (vgl. Menéndez Pelayo) unter vitalistischem Vorzeichen wiederzubeleben, erkennt man hier die Verwerfungslinie zwischen avantgardistischer Sportbegeisterung und (proto-)faschistischem Körperkult. Der Norden, dem Bereich des Wassers und des Weichen assoziiert, erweist sich aus Sicht des spanischen Avantgardisten als unfähig zur Feier von Körper, Leben und Tod, die sich im griechischen Stadium, im römischen Zirkus oder in der spanischen Stierkampfarena vollzieht: „Y así debió pasar en el circo romano y en el estadio griego. Olor a clavel, a sangre, a cosa morena, a barro cocido y agua fresca, a naranja, a cielo puro y a pie descalzo. Pero aquí – en estas ciudades líquidas, ciudades música, ciudades nube, ciudades yerba, ciudades blandas – ¡cómo gozar fiestas desnudas, gimnosdermas y duras!“ (62) Auch was die Architektur betrifft, halten die Niederlande eine „Enttäuschung“ bereit, die Gecé wiederum

dazu veranlasst, einen Nord-Süd-Kontrast zu statuieren und den Mittelmeerraum als legitimen Vertreter der Avantgarde dem europäischen Norden entgegenzustellen. Als begeisterter Leser von *De Stijl* huldigte Giménez Caballero dem Kult der „pureza“, der „línea eterna“ und der „exactitud racional“ und möchte anlässlich seiner Reise nach Holland eine konkrete Anschauung eben dieser Architektur gewinnen: „creía yo encontrar en la realidad aquel pulimento mágico del papel couché, aquel cubismo límpido de las estructuras, aquella gracia de las proporciones, aquel *belenismo* de la nueva tectónica“ (64). Doch seine Erwartung wird enttäuscht¹⁴: Ob die Bauvorhaben in den Niederlanden oder die Zickzackhäuser von Mei in Frankfurt, ob die Kölner Messe oder die Le Corbusier-Siedlung in Bordeaux – überall bleibt die Realität hinter der Reinheit des Konzepts zurück. Vor allem durch das Material, insbesondere den Backstein, der für „el pathos germánico, lo antihelénico, la antigracia. Lo espeso. Lo inelegante“ steht (64). Die Üppigkeit des Backsteins ist im Grunde eine „monströse“ Fortsetzung der vegetabilischen, orientalisch inspirierten Jugendstil-Architektur. Gegenüber solchen ‚Geschmacklosigkeiten‘ der modernen nordeuropäischen Baukunst erweist sich jeder andalusische oder marokkanische Kalk-Kubus als eigentliches Meisterwerk einer unbewussten Avantgarde-Architektur: „Si cualquier cubo andaluz o tangerino de cal está mucho más cerca de la verdad que estos insoportables ladrillos, ladrillos índicos, ladrillos que dan tono monstruoso, de extremo oriente, de templo búdico, de vegetalidad, de cosa javanesa a las cosas!“ (64).

Anhand von zwei avantgardistisch besetzten Bereichen, dem Sport und der Architektur, nimmt Ernesto Giménez Caballero somit eine antithetische Dissoziierung zwischen Norden und Süden, Zentrum und Peripherie Europas vor, die den mediterranen Raum zum eigentlichen Ort einer ebenso vitalistischen wie puristischen Avantgarde erhebt.

Faschismus und Bolschewismus als Aufstand der Peripherie

Letztlich macht sich der entscheidende Aufstand der Peripherie gegen das Zentrum an dem Schlüsselerlebnis Rom fest¹⁵: das antike Rom als Mutter

¹⁴ Mit Bezug auf die Architektur dient die griechische Antike übrigens als Paradigma des Apollinischen – und wird von der Wirklichkeit des Nordens ebenso wenig eingelöst wie das Dionysische im Bereich des Sports.

¹⁵ Vgl. Vfin., „El saetazo de Roma“. Ernesto Giménez Caballero y la Italia fascista“, in: Titus Heydenreich (Hrsg.), *Cultura italiana e spagnola a confronto: anni 1918-1939 / Culturas italiana y española frente a frente: años 1918-1939*, Tübingen 1992, 95-111.

der Hispania, der Latinität, das faschistische Rom als zukunftsweisendes Modell, Rom als Antipode der germanischen Metropole Berlin und vor allem als Antipode des Rheins, Inbegriff des früheren Wunsches nach europäischer Integration, wie er anlässlich seines Besuchs in Bonn erinnert:

Rin: fué mi Meca y mi Ceca. Fué para mí, la cuyuntura religiosa. Mi Sinaí. [...] Y, en efecto: con una ironía – de la que yo hubiera creído incapaz al blondo río – el Rin me señaló una sola conducta: lealtad de orígenes. Nada tiene – pues – de extraño si a la misma ribera renana encontré mi camino apasionado de Roma y de Oriente. (91)

Der Vergil seiner Italienreise ist im übrigen kein Geringerer als Curzio Malaparte, Prototyp des „joven fascista italiano, apto para la espada, la bala y la pluma“ (51), an den er wenig später, im Februar 1929, einen offenen Brief richten wird, der als erstes Manifest seine faschistische Überzeugung bekunden wird. Geleitet von diesem Cicerone, erfährt er in Rom zunächst eine ‚Taufe‘ in den Ursprüngen seiner Kultur; Rom offenbart sich ihm als Mutter seiner kastilisch-lateinischen Identität:

Pero en Roma, a las pocas horas de caer en Roma... ¿qué cosa me pasó? No sé. Sólo recuerdo que girovagué alucinado por calles, y jardines, y cielos, y árboles, y palacios, y acentos de aquella vida. Y que de pronto me encontré abrazado a Roma con un ansia incontenible y desarticulada de balbucear tenuemente: madre. Roma, a los pocos días, ya fué todo para mí.
Roma era el Madrid cesáreo e imperial que Madrid no sería nunca. [...] Era la matriz de una Castilla mía, depurada, antigua, eterna, celeste, inajenable. Roma era – ¡qué impresión descubrir eso, sencillamente! – mi lengua, el manantial de mi habla, espuma y cristal, originario, en el que yo ahora zahondaba mi espíritu como en un Jordán beatífico, saturándome de santidad, de *periodo de orígenes*, de filialidad, de ternura agradecida. (48)

Dieses antike, mittelalterliche und zugleich neue Rom rückt alle übrigen europäischen Kulturen mit ihrer „bastardía arrivista“ in den Hintergrund. Sodann erschließt sich ihm durch Rom das Phänomen des Faschismus als eine überwältigende Botschaft: „Tenía que admitirlo acriticamente. Como un mandato familiar, como una imperiosa mirada de obediencia“ (49). Das emblematische Schwarz – das Schwarzhemd der Faschisten und das ökumenische Schwarz der katholischen Kirche – wird für ihn zum Inbegriff seiner kulturellen Identität – „frente al rubio nórdico, frente al rojo asiático“ (49). Das Damaskuserlebnis Rom bedeutet zugleich eine prinzipielle Absage an die Avantgarde, die allerdings als Substrat, als Denkmodell wie als rhetorischer Gestus, präsent bleibt: „Roma, con su negro, me había dado la primera lección clara y determinante de mi

conducta cultural. Todo un pasado juvenil, envenenado de exotismos y torceduras, se me desvanecía como una veste de humo“ (49). Das faschistische Italien und das bolschewistische Russland erweisen sich als „Zwillingsbrüder im Nachkriegseuropa“. Sie sind beide antiliberal, antibürgerlich und dezidiert nationalistisch, was Gecé als die reinste Form von Internationalismus deutet¹⁶. Der Faschismus ist für Italien, was der Bolschewismus für Russland und der „catolicismo conquistador y democrático“ für Spanien (55) – und nicht zufällig trägt die 1932 publizierte pro-faschistische Kampfschrift des einstigen Avantgardisten den Titel *La nueva catolicidad*¹⁷. Für das zeitgenössische Spanien, das ungeachtet der Diktatur des Generals Miguel Primo de Rivera als liberal-verweichlichte Nation charakterisiert wird¹⁸, sei das faschistische Italien ein Exempel an „vertebración“ (52). Mit diesem Begriff bezieht sich Giménez Caballero auf Ortega y Gassetts kritische Bestandsaufnahme *España invertebrada* – „Spanien ohne Rückgrat“ – aus dem Jahre 1921. Als Vorläufer einer faschistischen Lösung für Spanien werden neben dem als „antiliberal, antidemokratisch und antibürgerlich“ qualifizierten Ortega y Gasset auch Pío Baroja und Miguel de Unamuno genannt, zwei Repräsentanten jener Generation von 1898, die das Verhältnis Spaniens zu Europa auf die Tagesordnung einer notwendigen Modernisierung gesetzt hatte¹⁹.

Die für den historischen Umbruchmoment des *Círculo imperial* charakteristische Verquickung von Faschismus und futuristisch inspirierter Avantgarde tritt besonders deutlich zutage, wenn das gewalttätige²⁰, anti-bourgeoise Moment des Faschismus oder die sportlich-dynamische Komponente im neuen Verständnis von Vaterland²¹ herausgestellt wer-

¹⁶ „El haber llegado Italia (como Rusia) a la conclusión de que el único internacionalismo útil, el único servicio grande al resto del mundo es el de ser fielmente nacionalistas“ (52-3).

¹⁷ Ernesto Giménez Caballero, *La nueva catolicidad. Ensayo sobre el Fascismo en Europa: en España*, Madrid 1932.

¹⁸ „Si el régimen actual de España es archiliberal es porque es archiburgués. [...] España hoy descansa, engorda, se abanica“ (52). Vgl. auch „El español joven de hoy siente tristemente adormecidos sus instintos brutales y agresivos, por tantos años de burocracia pacifista, de militarismo oficinesco, de predominio oficial de los viejos, de los ramplones, de los cursis de una clase media estricta“ (39-40).

¹⁹ „El ‚retorno al casticismo‘ de Unamuno es la anticipación a todo *strapaesanismo* italiano. La prédica antiliberal, antidemocrática y antiburguesa de Ortega es otro antecedente firme de las nuevas cosas. El sentido dictatorial, cesáreo, nietzscheano de Baroja es otro motivo de simpatía“ (53-4).

²⁰ Zum Gewaltpotenzial der Avantgarde vgl. Hanno Ehrlicher, *Die Kunst der Zerstörung. Gewaltphantasien und Manifestationspraktiken europäischer Avantgarden*, Berlin 2001.

²¹ Vgl. „Sólo con esta idea – que es la del futbolista y la del aeronauta, la del motorista – puede adquirir sentido nuevo, alegre y enérgico, esa melopea peligrosa que lleva en sí la tremenda palabra *patria*“ (19).

den. Wiederholt betont der Noch-Avantgardist Giménez Caballero den revolutionären Impetus des italienischen Faschismus als eines „movimiento de ‚nuevas valorizaciones‘, das einem „ansia de una forma política, antiburguesa, violenta y primacial de regir su destino“ Ausdruck gebe: „el fascismo de Italia es, en el fondo, un movimiento de ‘nuevas valorizaciones’. Por tanto, auténticamente revolucionario. Por tanto, mucho más joven de lo que creen los viejos liberales europeos, para quienes fascismo y reacción resultan algo unívoco“ (54). Solche revolutionären Bewegungen seien nur noch an der Peripherie, nicht im Zentrum der Moderne möglich, womit wir, unter dem Vorzeichen politischer Revolutionen, zur de- bzw. re-zentrierten Weltkarte der Surrealisten zurückkommen: „Las revoluciones son posibles en países como Rusia, Italia, España, los Balkanes, Venezuela, la Francia del XVIII, China. ¡Pero en Berlín, en Nueva York...! Da ganas de gritar de espanto o de risa“ (77).

Schluss

Auch Paris, seit der Aufklärung kosmopolitische Kapitale par excellence und Anziehungspunkt gerade auch der spanischen und lateinamerikanischen Moderne, wird in seiner Funktion als kulturelles Zentrum diskursiv entmachtet. Aus Sicht des Proto-Faschisten erscheint der Kosmopolitismus im „fondo subhumano y vil“ der Großstadt (115) als zudringliche Promiskuität (vgl. 116) und abstoßende ‚Überfremdung‘: „París tiene color bistre. Es decir, color de mestizaje“ (115). Paris wird reduziert auf Kunst und Erotik, die beide ausschließlich dem Kommerz unterworfen sind: „París es hoy solamente feria de muestras de carnes pintadas y de carnes desnudas“ (115). Von einer antikapitalistischen und rassistischen, antisemitischen Position aus wird Paris zu einer verabscheuungswürdigen „Internationale“ des Kapitalismus verzerrt, die es zu bekämpfen gilt: „*Internacional* dura, judaica, sin piedad. París produce más escalofrío que el peor ghetto oriental“ (115). Mit dem Sturz der Kulturhauptstadt Paris vollendet sich – auf dem Papier – die Dezentrierung Europas aus der Perspektive des spanischen Avantgardisten und Präfaschisten. Die Allianz der revolutionären, antibürgerlichen, dynamischen und zukunftssträchtigen Peripherie unter dem Zeichen eines rechten oder linken Totalitarismus bezeichnet den Entwurf eines anderen Europa im Umbruch von der künstlerischen zur politischen Avantgarde.

Ezra Pound's Fascist "Europa": Toward the *Pisan Cantos*

Ron Bush (University of Oxford)

As a lone ant from a broken ant-hill
from the wreckage of Europe, ego scriptor

(Canto 76 / 478)¹

What could be more counter-intuitive than an American poet appropriating völkisch idealizations of Europe to denounce his own country in a time of war? Yet that gesture or something very like it animates one of the greatest achievements of Anglo-American literary modernism: Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1948). This curiosity, embodied in my epigraph and raw on the unpublished pre-Pisan Italian drafts that form the subject of this essay, points to several unsettling features of the idea of Europe in the age of modernism. First it reminds us that "Europe" does not necessarily signify cosmopolitan: although the rallying cry of a European Union that wished to leave the nightmare of pre-war nationalism behind, the idea of Europe can also function as the sign of an aggrandized and aggressive culture of the soil. Second, it confirms (as if we needed further confirmation) that modernist visual and literary representations are not always oppositional. Modernist work, much of whose theory and practice had

¹ The standard published editions of the *Cantos* are now the 13th Printing of the New Directions 1970 edition, New York 1995. Unless otherwise noted, citations from the *Cantos* below will take the form of Canto / Page Number. The following texts of Ezra Pound are also indicated by abbreviation: EPS: *Ezra Pound Speaking: Radio Speeches of World War II*, ed. Leonard W. Doob, Westport 1978; IF: *Idee fondamentali 'Meridiano di Roma' 1939-1943*, ed. Caterina Ricciardi, Rome 1991; LE: *Literary Essays*, ed. T.S. Eliot, New York 1954; MA: *Machine Art & Other Writings: The Last Thought of the Italian Years*, ed. Maria Luisa Arduzzone, Durham 1996; SP: *Selected Prose 1908-1965*, ed. William Cookson, New York 1972; SR: *The Spirit of Romance*, New York 1952. All previously unpublished material by Ezra Pound, Copyright © 2009 by the Trustees of the Ezra Pound Literary Property Trust; used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp., agents for the Trustees. All published material by Ezra Pound used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

undoubtedly been framed as a questioning of intellectual, social, and literary conventions (in modernist poetry by utilizing images to disorient logical syntax), periodically concerned itself with the power of political 'icons' to consolidate rather than critique conservative ideology. I do not, though, here wish to affirm a foundational political valence (Fascist or otherwise) for post-imagist poetry.² Images and other irrational elements in modernist work always possess both critical and reactionary potential, and are open to historical and ideological inflection. This essay traces one such fluctuation, in which a Fascist vision of 'Europe' late in World War Two drove the literary idiom of Ezra Pound's famously difficult *Cantos* toward folk representations of a distinctly political kind.

Some Historical Background

Ezra Pound moved to Rapallo after prolonged and productive spells in London (1909-1920) and Paris (1920-1924). Along with Winston Churchill, he became an early and staunch supporter of Mussolini, but he remained loyal long after Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 caused many of Mussolini's English and American followers to re-evaluate.³ Pound's political sentiments were only reinforced when, after his elderly parents retired to Rapallo in the 1920s, it became impossible for him to return to the US even after America declared war on the Axis powers. During the war, Pound made broadcasts over the Italian radio, causing the American government to suspect him of providing aid and comfort to the enemy and to indict him for treason in July 1943. Meanwhile, the twenty years' progress of Pound's epic poem, the *Cantos*, had broken down amid the difficulties and stress of the war just as Pound began what he envisioned as the poem's philosophical Paradise. As Pound put it in his inimitable American diction, "if it weren't for this tiresome war", there would be time to consider whether Western thought had progressed or declined since the Middle Ages, and to ask questions such as, "Have we got better at thinkin'? Do we think with greater clarity? Or has the so-called program of science merely got us all cluttered up mentally and pitched us into greater confusion?"⁴

² For a more general consideration of post-imagist Anglo-American verse and fascist representation, see, for example, Robert Von Hallberg, "Libertarian Imagism", in: *Modernism/Modernity*, 2, 1993, 63-80.

³ For a history of Mussolini's reception, see John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America*, Princeton 1972.

⁴ EPS, 373-4. Speech of 24 July, 1943.

As I have rehearsed in a recent article, wartime conditions in northern Italy violently interrupted Pound's aspiration toward philosophy and turned his attention back toward history, in the form of a consuming preoccupation with the historical monuments of Italian culture that Allied air raids in 1943 and 1944 were reducing day by day.⁵ As this destruction proceeded, Pound lent his voice to the great theme of Fascist propaganda in the latter stages of the war – that the Allies were engaged in a campaign of calculated cultural terrorism, attempting what a recent book by Robert Bevan has called *The Destruction of Memory*. Allied bombing, in this view, was aimed not only at the demolition of Axis military and industrial structure, but also at what Bevan describes as an “enforced forgetting” linked to the premeditated dissolution of architectural traditions whose aim is “the erasure of the memories, history and identity attached to architecture and place”.⁶ Pound's outraged response to the Allied conduct of the war articulate a theory of cultural memory that identifies Italy with visual sophistication of classical culture and the Allied powers with a barbaric iconoclasm.

During the winter of 1943 and then in the summer and fall of 1944, churches around the sleepy town of Rapallo were damaged by Allied bombing raids aimed at anti-aircraft installations on the Ligurian coast and at the port city of Genoa. After Florence fell in September 1944, the bombardment of northern Italy only increased. Rimini and Forlì on the so-called Gothic Line continued to suffer heavy fighting, and the fate of Bologna hung in the balance. Exhausted by this effort, at the end of 1944 the Allies reined in their efforts for the winter. Though they managed to take Ravenna on December 5th, Bologna remained in Axis hands until the following year.⁷ Meanwhile, in Europe above the Alps the Battle of the Bulge raged on, allowing Mussolini a last hope that the invasion of Europe might be reversed.

In the midst of these developments, Mussolini's Ministry of Popular Culture launched a campaign to win back ordinary Italians to Fascism by reminding them of the way that Italy's cultural patrimony was being damaged beyond repair. That part of the Italian press still under Fascist sway took up the regime's cause enthusiastically. Mario Rivoire, for

⁵ “‘The Descent of the Barbarians’: *The Pisan Cantos* and Cultural Memory”, in: *Modernism/Modernity*, 14, 2007, 71-95.

⁶ Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, London 2006, 8. Bevan adds, “These buildings are attacked not because they are in the path of a military objective: to their destroyers, they *are* the objective”.

⁷ The most detailed account of these battles that I know is contained in Amadeo Montemaggi, *Linea Gotica 1944*, Rimini 2005.

example, was appointed editor of the *Il Secolo XIX* of Genoa just after September 1943 as part of what Lawrence Rainey has called "the [Salò] government's effort to control the press by placing trusted supporters in key positions" – an effort that underscored the destruction of cultural monuments "wrought by the 'terrorist bombers' of the English and Americans".⁸ One of *Il Secolo's* recurrent features carried a headline variation on the rubric "I monumenti che il nemico ci distrugge" (The Monuments the Enemy is Destroying). So on Sunday June 4, 1944 the paper published an article relating the damage that Allied bombing visited during late 1943 and early 1944 on the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini. The account shook Pound to the bone, recounting as it did the destruction of his personal paradigm for Renaissance achievement.

The raid on Rimini, though, proved to be only one of many shocks transmitted by the Fascist press that year, not only in *Il Secolo* but in the other newspapers Pound habitually read, including the anti-Semite Farinacci's *Regime Fascista*, and the *Corriere della Sera* of Milan, the most important newspaper still under Fascist sway.⁹ In 1944 the *Corriere* echoed *Il Secolo's* "Monumenti" articles with its own series about the destruction of Italy's artistic patrimony under the general rubric "L'Italia Artistica Mutilata" and on September 4th announced the destruction of another of Pound's cherished places, the brilliant mosaic chamber outside Ravenna commonly known as the mausoleum of the Empress Aelia Galla Placidia. The *Corriere's* first page reported Ravenna had suffered multiple attacks, and that almost all the great public buildings of the city that had once been capitol of the Byzantine Exarchate had been badly damaged.

But the most important single spur to Pound's new composition was a long wartime summary that appeared in the *Corriere's* Sunday edition of December 3rd 1944 (Figure 16). After a subhead that screamed, "La calata degli iconoclasti" (The Descent of the Iconoclasts), the article proffered shocking pictures of the bomb-damaged Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan and the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini. Noting the recent re-bombing of Genoa, the piece related ruin all over northern Italy. The cities of Forlì and Ravenna, it observed, "have not had peace for months", and the great churches of Ravenna have been reduced to a pile of ruins.

⁸ Lawrence Rainey, *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture*, Chicago 1991, 212.

⁹ Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, New York 1991, 197-8. The *Corriere's* pliant position in regard to Fascism can be noted in the good relations between its editor, Ermanno Amicucci, and Fernando Mezzasoma, the RSI's Minister of Popular Culture and a correspondent of Pound's. See Redman (page 240) who notes that Mezzasoma had recommended Pound to Amicucci for work in late 1943, but the latter "thought Pound's Italian was incomprehensible and unusable".

But the text's leader voiced the *Corriere's* core ideology: "From sacred and profane monuments to masterpieces of painting, sculpture and the decorative arts, the catalogue of destruction is endless: *once more the barbarian storm has descended on soil that tends the traces and the spirit of the highest civilizations*" (emphasis mine). The European spirit of the highest civilizations (*il fuoco delle più nobili civiltà*), it reminded its readers, is at stake in the current conflict between culture and barbarism, and the future hinges on the fate of the soil (*terra*) of classical Rome in its Fascist reincarnation.



Fig. 16: *Corriere della sera*, Sunday December 3, 1944, 3.

The article's conclusion strove to associate the destructiveness of the American bombers with a more insidious barbarian evil carried out by cosmopolitan enemies of the state. The downfall of Italian culture, the piece laments, is as much the fault of international (read: Jewish) finance as of Allied bombing. Even if Italy's remaining treasures were to escape

the chaos of battle, "in the wake of the invasion a crowd of special interests (*una folla di interessi*) has targeted our artistic heritage". Financial speculation and inflation, it avers, have put into place an art market that will spirit away what has not been destroyed, unless Italians respond to "the duty to resist, or at least to react to the allurements of plundering finance (*allettamenti della moneta rapinatrice*), refusing a commerce forbidden by law".

Yet, the *Corriere* consoled its readers, because of the efforts of Fascist Italy the cause of Latin Europe is not yet lost. Some monuments have survived, and Ravenna and Bologna continue to resist. Crucially, the article focussed its account of civilization around Dante, who fostered "the resurrection of the Italian nation" (*la resurrezione della Patria*) and was buried in the Ravennese "fragrant pine wood" (*la dolce pineta*) immortalized in *Purgatorio* XXVIII.20.

Italian Drafts: "Europa"

This and associated stories, combined with the unexpected Fascist hopes fomented by the hiatus in the Allies' advances in winter 1944, kick-started Pound's work on new Cantos and triggered four months of almost continuous composition in Italian, continuing until April 1945. The first fruit of this composition consisted of two militantly pro-Fascist poems which were published immediately in an Italian military magazine and then set aside, only many years later to be inserted as Cantos 72 and 73 into their chronological place in the published *Cantos*.¹⁰ As soon these Cantos were finished, however, Pound began a series of drafts that have until recently remained unknown and together comprise what amounts to a full-length suite of Italian poems that voice both the lost beauty of Italy's artistic patrimony and Pound's rage against the "iconoclasts" responsible for its destruction.¹¹ When in April 1945 Pound submitted himself into

¹⁰ For commentary on Cantos 72 and 73, see Rainey, *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture*; Eva Hesse, *Ezra Pound: Die Ausgefallenen Cantos LXXII Und LXXIII*, Zurich 1991; and Robert Casillo, "Fascists of the Final Hour: Pound's Italian Cantos", in: Richard J. Golson (ed.), *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, Hanover 1992, 98-127. Annotated English translations of Cantos 72 and 73 have now been published (followed by annotated English translations of the typescripts of the Italian Cantos 74 and 75) by Massimo Bacigalupo. See "Ezra Pound's Cantos 72 and 73: An Annotated Translation", in: *Paideuma*, 20, 1991, 11-41. Cantos 72 and 73 now appear in the *Cantos* as C72-3/423-42.

¹¹ See Bush, "The Descent of the Barbarians". Also the related articles: "'Quiet, Not Scornful?': The Composition of the *Pisan Cantos*", in: Lawrence Rainey (ed.), *A Poem Including History: The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, Ann Arbor 1996, 169-212; "Towards Pisa: More

the custody of the American forces and was detained for the summer and part of the fall at the American Disciplinary Training Center (DTC) near Pisa, he incorporated fragments of these drafts into the English-language *Pisan Cantos* he composed between July and November 1945. In both the English and in the Italian phases of this work, Pound follows the *Corriere's* admonition to preserve the memory of all that had been recently lost and to reinforce Fascism's twenty years' reconsolidation of European civilization.

The remainder of this essay considers Pound's representation of Europe in a key sequence of his unpublished Italian drafts and examines his decision to invoke the form of a Catholic folk icon. This swerve toward primitive representation, moreover, also characterized the Italian drafts as a whole. Writing in the language of his adopted country as an act of loyalty, Pound's wartime compositions vacillate between complex modernist organizations and a set of loosely orchestrated dramatic tableaux steeped in the medieval colloquies of the *Divina Commedia*, in which voices from the past are entertained at some length. Pound's run of manuscripts and typescripts show him first sketching out and polishing extended examples of such tableaux, then cannibalizing them for the slightly more musical complexities of provisional Italian Cantos 74 and 75, and finally returning to his earlier texts, finishing and polishing typescripts of the tableaux in their original form.¹²

One can see the beginning of these developments in the earliest of Pound's drafts, in which Europe at the end of the war is personified in the expression of a suffering and homeless young girl, called only "la sfollata" (the evacuee). Interestingly the word comes straight out of Pound's wartime correspondence. On Monday the 4th of September 1944, the Allies bombed Genoa and Rapallo, weakening Renaissance arches in Rapallo and degrading the city's supply of drinking water. Ten days later, Pound, displaced by the Axis military in May from his apartment in Rapallo and compelled to relocate himself and his wife (in the event, into the residence of his mistress, Olga Rudge, situated on a hill path above the city in Sant' Ambrogio), wrote to Fernando Mezzasoma, the Salò Republic's Minister of Popular Culture, to advise on the situation, and

From the Archives about Pound's Italian Cantos", in: *Agenda*, 34, 1996/97, 89-124; "Towards Pisa: Ezra Pound's Roman 'Emperors'", in: *Revista di Letteratura d'America*, 23, 2003, 135-59; "The Expatriate in Extremis: Caterina Sforza, Fascism, and Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos*", in: *Revista di Letteratura d'America*, 25, 2005, 27-43.

¹² A full study of this work forms part of the author's current work in progress, *The Composition of the Pisan Cantos*.

referred to himself as a "sfollata".¹³ In a poetic draft of December 1944, Pound appropriates the word to render a mysterious encounter on the hillside above Rapallo with a wandering young girl. In this brief sketch, the meeting seems stylistically simple, poignant, and vivid, suggesting memory more than invention:

Su dal mare nella salita
 l'incontra[i] che mi disse
 Sono ^la^ sfo[l]lata. io sono la luna
 non era né bionda né bruna
 Ho il tetto distrutto
 la sofia i scogli
 Dove abitai è ormai distrutto
~~Cap[p]ella~~ sofia i scogli
 mia cap[p]ella
 un gelso copriva la porta
 combusta
 D' accanto della cap[p]ella¹⁴

Far from transparent, though, the draft when examined closer suggests overlapping planes of reference. The encounter takes the form of a Dantescan conversation with a ghostly presence who mysteriously also refers to herself as "la luna" (as in Saint Francis' 'Sorella La Luna' in the "Cantico del Sole"¹⁵) and as "la sofia i scogli" – the Sofia of the cliffs, as if a Byzantine image of the Madonna in a church damaged by Allied

¹³ Letter of 14 September 1944 at the Beinecke, Library, Yale. (YCAL MSS43 Box 34 Folder 1429.) An English translation of this letter can be found in Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, 260-1.

¹⁴ The provenance of all of Pound's typescripts referred to below unless otherwise indicated is: Beinecke Library Yale, YCAL MSS53 Box 29, Folder 627. Translation:

Up from the sea on the salita
 I met her who said to me
 I am the evacuee. I am la luna
 she was neither blond nor brunette
 My home was destroyed
 la sofia [of the] the cliffs
 where I lived has just been destroyed
 la sofia of the cliffs my chapel
 a mulberry tree covered the door
 burned
 next to the chapel

¹⁵ See SR, 102-3 for Pound's commentary on Saint Francis.

bombing. The figure has been exiled from her dome or pedestal and is looking for another home.

In subsequent drafts, Pound produced two elaborated versions of this encounter under the titles “la salita” (the hill path) and “l’Assunta” (the Madonna of the Assumption). In the latter, the young girl also refers to herself – portentously – as “Europa”. The following is a version of “l’Assunta” inserted onto pages 4 and 5 of Pound’s rejected Italian Canto 75. Note that even embedded into a complex poetic organization, the text struggles to foreground its iconic simplicity:

75/4

Mai con codardi (codini) sarà l'arte monda
 [l]ascia che i Dei ritornan fra di voi /
 e con questo
 Ave Maris Stell[a] mi suonò all' orrecchio, per l'aria ser[a]le
 e col ramo di . io la vidi
 come Kuanina, col ramo [d]i salce¹⁶/ vidi l'eterna dolcezza
 formata: di misericordia la madre, dei mari protettrice
 so[c]corso in naufragio/ manifesto/
 sempre rivista a Prato, e Monte Rosa ^delle Grazie^
 ^è in rovina^
 distrutta è la Fano delle Grazie/ a Pantaleo mi [r]ifugio
 da la dorata/ sempre cacci[a]ta
 vaga, invicta; Lucina dolentibus/ sono così lunare
 di bachi protettrice; umile; duratura/
 il pargoletto mi ama, ch' io nutro/ Io son la Luna/
 non son la Sofia; anzi la temo
 ieratica/ mosaicata/

 So[f]ia Hecate; nemmeno conosco / mai incoron[a]ta, nell' alta sfera
 [i]eratica/ stato lontano: dan[n]eggia, taglia ; terrore

 io son' la cacciata. Io, da Giove amata: mesta,
 errante. Europa mi chiamai / sotto le stelle d'Orso
 sotto gli ulivi, vista da te olim/
 mio marito ~~baccava~~ (la terra) ~~del~~ sul clivo
 ^zaffava al clivo^ ^vangava^
 mio sposo novello
 col pargoletto sedevo/ tu m'hai visto /
 non son Sofia, anzi la temo

75/5

i codini non son [i] miei amici

¹⁶ A variant of “salice”, willow.

io son la cacciata
 Artemide nemmeno m'è amica: il pargoletto mi ama
 ch'io nutro / io son la Luna. e il latte

troppo spiegar, ti sarà presuntuoso / Pietà mi chiamai anche
 mio figlio è morto / Io son l'assunta.¹⁷

The way Pound ideologically positions 'Europa' here corresponds to the draft's stylistic faux-naivete and has something to do with the way she is implicated in Italy's wartime history. Where "la sfollata" did not specify

17 75/4

Never with the cowards (the fanatics) will there be a clean art
 let the gods return among you /
 and with this /
 Ave Maris Stella sounded in my ear through the evening air
 and with a branch of . I saw her
 like Kuanon, with a branch of willow/ I saw the eternal sweetness
 fully formed: mother of pity, protectress of the seas
 succor in shipwreck / manifest/
 always seen again, at Prato and Monte Rosa delle Grazie
 destroyed is the shrine / at Pantaleo I take refuge
 from [in?] la dorata / always banished
 vaga, invicta; Lucina dolentibus/ I am thus lunar
 of cocoons the protectress; humble, lasting
 the little boy loves me, whom I feed/ I am the Moon
 I am not Sofia; on the contrary I fear her
 hieratic/ mosaiced
 Sofia Hecate; I don't know her either / never crowned, in the high sphere
 hieratic/ distant state: damage, cut, terror
 I am the banished one, Io, beloved of Jove: sad,
 wandering. Europa they called me, / under the stars of Orso
 under the olives, seen by you olim
 my husband hoed the earth on the hillside
 my bridegroom
 I was sitting with the little boy / you saw me/
 I am not Sofia, in fact I fear her

75/5

the fanatics are not my friends
 I am the banished one
 not even Artemis is my friend: the little boy loves me
 whom I feed / I am the Moon , and the milk

 to explain too much, would be presumptuous / I was also called Pietà
 my son is dead / I am l'assunta

her destroyed house, this speaker identifies her origins with a confused series of Italian shrines to the Madonna: “Monte Rosa” (Montallegro, a church situated on limestone cliffs above Rapallo); the Santuario (or Fano, shrine) “Delle Grazie” on slightly lower cliffs near Rapallo at Chiavari; and a chapel of the Madonna at Prato, near Florence. These places, she says, are ruined (*in rovina*) and destroyed (*distrutta*). Interestingly, however, although the last appears among the losses listed by the “calata degli iconoclasti” article in the *Corriere* (which reports that in the church of San Bartolomeo at Prato a fresco attributed to Filippo Lippi was destroyed along with the tabernacle of Santa Margherita of Filippino), the first two remained untouched by Allied raids.¹⁸ However, namesakes of them were not so lucky. In Pound’s neighboring Genoa, L’Antico Santuario delle Grazie and L’Oratorio di S.M. Assunta di Coronata were heavily damaged, and in La Spezia the Colleggiata di S. Maria Assunta was exploded.¹⁹ Much more prominently (as described in “la calata degli iconoclasti”), the church and convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, the latter housing Leonardo’s Last Supper, were blasted. Whether Pound misinterpreted the intermittent reporting of bombing around his area and assumed that the damaged churches in Genoa and La Spezia in fact referred to local shrines, or whether he used literary licence to deliberately telescope the names of the more famous damaged churches with those of the undamaged ones nearby, we cannot know. The poetic effect on the other hand is clear. The poem broadens its reference to include a national view like that of the *Corriere* at the same time as it fixes the dramatic action of the poem on a recognizable local place.

There is, in fact, even a local source for the model of the wandering Madonna, as one would expect from a poet whose usual method of composition was to build on personal experience. This is a stylized statue of the Madonna (Figure 17), displaced during the Ligurian bombing a few months before Pound’s letter to Mezzasoma. As with Pound’s speaker, the statue bears a speaking motto or legend – “Io sono l’immacolata concezzione” (I am the Immaculate Conception) – replicated in Pound’s theological approximation “Io son l’assunta” and recalled more precisely, as we shall see, in his final version of the scene in Canto 80. At the start of the war the statue stood in the parish Church of San Martino, in Zoagli (Figure 18), the town immediately to the east of Rapallo and situated below the coast road, on the sea. During the war, the Germans established

¹⁸ Carlo Ceschi, *I Monumenti della Liguria e La Guerra 1940-45*, Genova 1949. Note that figures 18 and 19 are derived from this source.

¹⁹ Ceschi, *I Monumenti della Liguria e La Guerra 1940-45*, 137-8, 263-4.



Fig. 17:
Statue of the Madonna ("Io sono
l'immacolata concezzione") Church of
San Martino, Zoagli. (Near Rapallo)



Fig. 18:
Façade, Church of San Martino,
Zoagli. 1930s.

their local headquarters at Portofino to the west and were serviced by a railroad system that crossed various viaducts including the one over Zoagli. These in turn were protected by anti-aircraft installations that also served to defend the city of Genoa. On December 27, 1943 a substantial Allied aerial bombardment aimed at the Zoagli viaduct struck the Church of San Martino and damaged it severely (Figure 19). The raid killed 44 civilians, including the parish priest.

After this and subsequent bombardments, the statue of the Madonna of the Immaculate Conception, which had been against all probability left intact, was moved to the neighbouring church of Sant' Andrea di Rovereto. Meanwhile the parish services associated with San Martino migrated to the church of San Pantaleo above Zoagli, a few minutes from Olga Rudge's house.²⁰ It is therefore more than possible that Pound encountered the "wandering" statue in transit after hearing of its miracu-

²⁰ Some of the history of the damage is remembered in Adriana Amici *et al.*, *Le Vie Del Velluto: L'Entroterra di Zoagli*, Zoagli 1991, 23. Confirmation that the statue predated the war and the story of its transfer thanks to the historian of Zoagli, Lino Moscatelli. Private communication, August 1, 2005.



Fig. 19: Collapsed vault and damaged interior, Church of San Martino, Zoagli, after the raid of December 27, 1943.

lous escape. It is also possible that he mistakenly believed the statue had been removed from Il Santuario Delle Grazie, a few miles beyond Zoagli in Chiavari.

Whatever the text's exact historical provenance, Pound renders "l'Assunta" as a stylized Madonna – a traditional symbol encrusted by folk custom and impervious to elaboration by individual expression or philosophical abstraction. The poem implies that only in such images can collective identity be consolidated, and that precisely for this reason such objects became the targets both of American airstrikes and Jewish scavengers. The poem therefore begins by crying out against "[i] codardi" – the "cowardly" American bombardiers who spew destruction from the air – and "[i] codini" – religious fanatics who have degraded symbolic representation. The latter phrase ordinarily refers to Catholic zealots but here denounces Semitic iconoclasts. The two denunciations are expanded in an interim draft by a third, directed against "gli ebrei" (the Jews). Opposing the three, the poem's speaker expresses a core Poundian admonition: "[l]ascia che i Dei ritornan fra di voi" – let the gods return among you. Her meaning can be glossed by Pound's essays of the early 40s. In "Convenit esse Deos", for example, he writes that "for the lack of

gods (plural) man suffers, or let us say he very gradually impoverishes his mind by the elimination of irreplaceable concepts"²¹ (MA, 135). The "prohibition of 'graven images'" of the gods, in other words (whose concreteness, according to Pound, protects us against an "abstract and generic" mode of thought, IF, 102), ineluctably leads to the debasement of symbolic discourse and the disappearance of core human values.

Along with these essays, "l'Assunta" rails at an American culture rooted in Judaic and Protestant iconoclasm for having destroyed religious symbols and for having debased religion from illumination to abstract dogma. The young girl calls herself "la cacciata" to suggest the frequency with which she and her kind have been banished from post-Reformation culture.²² Pound's 1944 essay "Una Carta di Visita" (translated as "A Visiting Card") spells out the point. It denounces "the Jewish poison" for propelling "Protestantism against the unity of the Mother Church, always destroying the true religion, destroying its mnemonic and commemorative symbols" (SP, 320). Another of his pre-Pisan Italian drafts echoes the sentiment, ascribing to the Semitic tradition a need to "distruggere i simboli del bel (pensier) pensiero".

The putatively positive side of Pound's Fascist anti-Semitism involves propagating an "arte monda" – an art "cleaned" of abstraction. So the "l'Assunta" text concludes with a protest that "troppo spiegare, ti sarà presuntuoso" – to explain too much, would be presumptuous. More significantly, the poem self-consciously fashions the symbolic figure at its center along the lines of a folk icon. The figure's simple integrity asserts itself through abbreviated mottos ("Io son' la cacciata"; "Io son l'assunta"; "Pietà mi chiamai anche"), imitating the "Io sono l'immacolata concezzione" affixed to the statue illustrated in Figure 17. These mottoes also echo repeated phrases in the *Divina Commedia*. Aspiring toward folk simplicity, the text reaches back to medieval literary expression analogous to medieval visual convention. This includes not only a pastiche of

²¹ In Pound's original Italian: "Parlerò in aun altro articolo della distruzione dei simboli; cioè di ogni forma di comunicazione che induce lo studioso all' indagine deliberata e contemplativa dei fatti che non si può comunicare con una fras astratta e generica. Questa battaglia data non solamente dal tempo degli iconoclasti, data dal divieto di fare 'immagini scolpite'". (It is worth noting that Pound repeats the phrases, "distruzione dei simboli" and "immagini scolpiti" in other Italian drafts concerning Lorenzo de' Medici and Sigismondo Malatesta.)

²² Cf. Pound's argument in the same essay that the "force" of Semitism "falsifies [...] destroys every clearly delineated symbol, dragging man into a maze of abstract arguments, destroying not one but every religion. But the images of the gods, or Byzantine mosaics, move the soul to contemplation and preserve the tradition of the undivided light" (SP, 306-7).

Dante's language, but allusions to the so-called 'Litany of the Madonna', a medieval chant which the narrator of the poem tells us "sounded in my ear through the evening air". The Litany refers to Mary as "Mater Misericordiae" and Pound knew it formed the basis of a local festival in which a procession of boats sets out on the first Sunday in August from Camogli, near Rapallo, to Punta della Chiappa.²³

Pound also amplifies the poem's folk associations by endowing his wandering Madonna with other features of local custom – the lineaments of a protectress of the seas and of the shipwrecked, for example, or of a patroness of silkworms and their cultivators. These attributions prominently feature inside the churches the poem names, as Pound's wartime essays confirm. In the latter we find reference to "the sea-board shrines to the Madonna della Grazie", including "sailor shrines at points commanding a view of the sea [like] that on Monte Allegro on the limestone heights above Rapallo. The shrines are filled with votive offerings of ship models and picture of shipwrecks from which the votators have been saved" (MA, 133). The same essay also memorializes "the people of Rapallo rushing down into the sea on Easter morning or bringing their gardens of Adonis [prematurely forced plantings] to church on the Thursday before" (MA, 131); and "the silk cocoons, which, during Easter week, the peasant women bring to church carefully concealed under their aprons" (MA, 131-2).²⁴

It is a little bizarre, of course, to observe the attraction of such matters to Ezra Pound, a quintessential son of American Puritanism who could write as late as 1939: "I don't have to *try* to be American. Merrymont, Braintree, Quincy, all I believe in or by, [is contained in] what had been a plantation named [after his mother's family] Weston's" (LE, 322). One explanation, which raises as many questions as it resolves, can be found in something Pound wrote a year later: "I am a Catholic and I am not ready to deny it [...]. I do not 13th March anno XVIII [1940] deny any catholic dogma" (MA, 141). Pound's "Catholicism", he made clear, however, coincided not with dogma but with a kind of pan-European structure of custom and beliefs connected to European values and European soil. "What we believe is EUROPEAN". "The Xtian Church was of very

²³ See Stewart Rossiter (ed.), *The Blue Guide: Northern Italy from the Alps to Rome*, 1924, rvd. London 1971, 106.

²⁴ All the following citations in this paragraph come from an important essay of 1939 entitled "European Paideuma". The essay has been published in several transcriptions. I quote where possible from the abridged one included in MA, 131-4 because it is the more accessible. A longer draft can be found along with a great deal of helpful commentary in Massimo Bacigalupo, "Ezra Pound's 'European Paideuma'", in: *Paideuma*, 30, 2001, 225-45.

mixed elements. The valid elements European".²⁵ The things that Europeans believe, he added, are "implicit in our way of living" (MA, 131). They are therefore only accessible in the folkloric customs of the Church, not through book instruction, "which only serve to obscure them" (MA, 131). These folk customs express, he argues, "observance, thankfulness, fear and a belief in the commonplace and ever-recurring miracle of growth" (MA, 131), and they are 'grafted onto' "the really vigorous feasts of the Church" – "the European ones, those which existed before the Church and which will remain when the Church is forgotten: the feasts of the sun, of the harvest, and of Aphrodite" (MA, 133).²⁶

For Pound, in other words, the religious images of the church do not constitute expressions of Catholic theology. On the contrary, he believed that Christian thought is an extrapolation of a deeper, European set of images and belief. Hence, though the speaker of Pound's poem names herself as "l'assunta", she also acknowledges a more authentic identity – "Europa mi chiamai". In an unpublished but seminal essay entitled "European Paideuma" and in associated articles in the *Meridiano di Roma*, Pound elaborates, writing in the former that "the sea-board shrines to the Madonna delle Grazie [...] have most emphatically not come from Palestine. The Madonna of the Italian peasant is an *örtliche raumgebundene Gottheit*, a purely local divinity. She is THEIR Madonna, present in a given ambience" (MA, 133). He added in the *Meridiano di Roma* that "the ordinary Madonna of Italian painting is not a symbol of a religious abstraction, but of maternity. She is the ancient 'Charitas' [...]. For this reason it is redundant to point out that many churches are built over pagan temples; you can see the same phenomenon intact in the figure of Stella Maris patroness of sailors" (IF, 134).

Because of this deeper European identity, the speaker of "l'Assunta" dissociates herself viscerally from the Church's attempts to impose on her a more intellectual or hieratic form. Playing on the word "mosaicata",

²⁵ Bacigalupo, "Ezra Pound's 'European Paideuma'", 226.

²⁶ No less than its Roman antecedent, this religion, Pound argues in another essay, holds (IF, 136) that "La terra è sacra. Il grano è sacro. L'etica sorge dall' agricoltura" and "Il grano è sacro. Il grano è corpo di Dio Questa verità sacra è verità Europea [...]. Misteri bacchichi, cioè del vino. Misteri d'Eleusi (Eleusini). Are di Venere mai macchiate di sangue [...]. Alla Chiesa Cattolica Romana spetta la gloria d'aver conservato il mistero sacro del grano, per secoli scuri, secoli tempestati dai barbari e dall'ignoranza" (IF, 87). (The earth is sacred. Grain is sacred. Ethics flow from agriculture./ Grain is sacred. Grain is the body of God. This sacred is the European truth [...]. Bacchic mysteries, that is, of wine. Eleusinian Mysteries. The altars of Venus are never stained with blood [...]. To the Catholic Church belongs the glory of having conserved the sacred mystery of grain, though ages of darkness, of barbarian tempests and of ignorance.)

which means both mosaiced and Moses-ized, she protests that “non son la Sofia; anzi la temo/ ieratica/ mosaicata” (I am not Sofia; on the contrary, I fear her/ hieratic/ mosaicata). She lives in terror after having been hunted by Allied bombing, but she also remembers previous wanderings, when she was banished again and again by the displacements of the Church. And so, the second time she denounces “i codini”, she uses the phrase to refer to fanatics representing Semitic (“Mosaic”) currents *within* Christianity. She is an image of the people, not of the priests.

“L’Assunta” extends the claim of this European world-view further still, suggesting in its second line that it is only a short step from recognizing the folk resonance of Catholic images to welcoming back the pre-Christian Gods. The text attempts exactly that, overlaying the Christian lineaments of the Madonna with aspects of pre-Christian Europe. Pound’s speaker calls attention to herself, for example, not only as one who has been exalted – “l’assunta” – but more specifically as a figure of the moon (“Io sono la luna”) linked to the maternal aspects of the Roman goddess Diana. (The poem thus invokes Lucina, who presides over childbirth in Ovid’s *Fasti* (II.49), and Hecate, who, according to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (VII.94), represents the infernal guise of the *diva triformis* called Luna in heaven and Diana on Earth.²⁷) Even goddesses outside of what we ordinarily think of as Europe are admitted into this synthesis, including the Buddhist avatar of mercy, Kuanon.²⁸

The important distinction that Pound would make, here, then, is not between Europe and Asia (Japan, after all was part of the Axis), but a common Fascist division between a Nordic/Mediterranean/European civilization on the one hand, and an African/Semitic civilization on the other. As he writes in “European Paideuma”, “Sound ethic we have from Confucius via Mencius [...]. The tradition[al] portrait of Confucius shows him a Nordic [...]. How far South of the 38th parallel can we go without [...] unsleeping suspicion of every belief [...]?”²⁹ When Pound’s speaker identifies herself as “Europa”, therefore, she does so with a nod to a specific text in Dante: “Europa mi chiamai/ sotto le stelle d’Ors[a]” (I was called Europa/ under the stars of the Bear). The *Paradiso*, Charles

²⁷ Pound’s reference for classical mythology was ordinarily Lemprière’s *Classical Dictionary*, London n.d. See 329, 259-60.

²⁸ For the source and the nuances of the iconography in Pound’s “Kuanina/Kuanon” (a Buddhist figure of compassion), see Britton Gildersleeve, “‘Enigma’ at the Heart of Paradise: Buddhism, Kuanon, and the Feminine Ideogram in *The Cantos*”, in: Zhaoming Qian (ed.), *Ezra Pound and China*, Ann Arbor 2003, 193-213.

²⁹ Bacigalupo, “Ezra Pound’s ‘European Paideuma’”, 226.

Singleton reminds us, refers to the constellations of the she-bears, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor together, "to indicate the pole of the northern hemisphere".³⁰ (*Paradiso* II.9: "L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse;/ Minerva spira, e conducemì Apollo,/ e nove Muse mi dimostrar l'Orse".)

Pound's Italian draft, in other words, is not without racist assumptions. Nor does it lack an Imperialist spin. When his "Europa" boasts of Jove's love, she adduces Ovid's story in *Metamorphosis* II.834-75 of a daughter of the king of Phoenecia wooed by Jove in the form of a bull and then carried North across the Mediterranean, where she eventually marries the king of Crete and lays the foundations of a new civilization. It is this Northern (or in Pound's charged word, Nordic) civilization, the poem insinuates, that in 1945 must still be defended against African/Semitic violence.

More could be said about "l'Assunta", but I hope I have suggested the way its aesthetics are permeated by an idealized Fascist vision of Europe at the close of the Second World War. Embracing folk Catholicism as an embodiment of the European mind rooted in classical Rome, Pound altered not only his politics but his poetic practices, and his swerve toward archaic representation curiously echoes the pan-European appropriation of the Latin tradition by conservatives in France and England during the *rappel à l'ordre* that followed the First World War.³¹ Like neo-classicists in the Paris of the early 1920s, "l'Assunta" advances a vision of Europe bearing a distinctly nativist spin, and identifies an Italian "Patria" with the classical tradition of Virgil and Dante while opposing it to the menace of diluters and barbarians.

It would be an exaggeration, though, to assert that Pound's 1945 turn toward folk aesthetics irrevocably transformed the modernist idiom of the *Cantos*. Pound, it is true, did not disown his Italian compositions, but he did reabsorb them in a different medium. Incarcerated near Pisa after the Allied victory, in July 1945 and with his Italian drafts in his head, Pound began to compose what would become his most celebrated sequence of *Cantos*, this time in English. In poems he eventually entitled the *Pisan Cantos*, he remembered "l'Assunta", and inserted bits of it without explanation. Consider, for example, this passage from Canto 80:

so that leaving America I brought with me \$80
and England a letter of Thomas Hardy's
and Italy one eucalyptus pip

³⁰ Charles Singleton, *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso. 2: Commentary*, Princeton 1975, 41.

³¹ For post-war France, Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925*, London 1989.

Writing the Foundations of a Better World: The Role of Anglo-German Literary Exchange in the Reconstruction of Germany and the Construction of Europe, 1945-1949

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In November 1944 the British poet Stephen Spender offered his services to his government to help reconstruct occupied Germany at the end of the war. As a writer, he told the Allied Control Commission, he might be of particular use. After the war there would “certainly be some kind of literary and cultural movement in Germany, as there was after the last war”. “Do you think”, asked the incredulous interviewer, “that after the Nazis there can really be such a development?”¹ As far as the official governmental policy towards Germany was concerned, there could be no such thing as German culture; no aspect of the national character was untainted by the Nazis.

But Spender was not alone in thinking that the story was more complex. He was a part of a band of British intellectuals that included Julian Huxley, Storm Jameson and Victor Gollancz who were convinced that the British and the Germans shared a European identity with a collective European memory of the inter-war European avant-garde. Spender and his compatriots now sought to build a new, shared identity out of the ruins that surrounded them.

In their quest to reignite a common European heritage, this group of British intellectuals was joined by a group of German and Austrian writers who had been exiled in London during the war. Two among these were the Austrian novelist and critic Hilde Spiel and her husband, the German novelist Peter de Mendelssohn. The couple had emigrated to London in 1938, deciding to go to England and not America because they wanted to be a part of the country that would be fighting a European war on their behalf: “Wenn England kämpft, dann kämpft es nicht nur für sich selbst,

¹ Quoted by John Sutherland, *Stephen Spender, The Authorized Biography*, London 2005, 299.

sondern auch für uns [...]. Wir sind Europäer".² Once in Britain, they did their best to be assimilated into the London cultural scene, writing in English and getting to know British writers. Both became regular contributors to the *New Statesman*, which Spiel would describe as the "favourite periodical of the English intelligentsia".³

Within a year after the end of the Second World War, Spender, Spiel and de Mendelssohn all had official roles in Germany or Austria, acting on behalf of the British government. Abandoning their initial scepticism, the government gave Spender two brief commissions to guide postwar Germany back to democracy in 1945, first investigating the attitudes of German professors and intellectuals, and then assisting in the denazification of the country's libraries. De Mendelssohn was sent to Berlin to start newspapers in the British zone, and shortly afterwards his wife was sent to Vienna as a British press officer. All three used their official positions to attempt to create dialogue between English- and German-speaking writers and to cross-pollinate British and German literature, past and present.

This essay will explore the role of these three intellectuals in particular in facilitating Anglo-German cultural exchange and creating a literary European community between the end of the war and the creation of an independent German state in 1949. All three wanted to forge a new Europe, culturally, physically and spiritually, and all three were working from both a British and a German perspective. De Mendelssohn and Spiel brought back to Germany and Austria a very English idea of literature, culture and democracy, and at the same time attempted to find the best new German writers an audience in Britain. In this cross-pollination they continued work that had been done on a smaller scale during the Second World War, facilitated by Storm Jameson and the English centre of the PEN, the International Association of Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists. After the Second World War, PEN continued its work, sponsoring the creation of a new Austrian and eventually a new German centre, and it was joined in its efforts by Unesco, formed in 1946 to unite the "hearts and minds of Europe", with Spender as its first Head of Literature.

The story told here could have gone in several directions. If Spender's cries for a strong Germany were heeded in the late 1940s and early 1950s

² "If England fights, it fights not just for itself but also for us [...] We are Europeans." Peter de Mendelssohn, "Bruchstücke aus dem Prolog zu dem unvollendeten Buch 'Den ganzen Weg zurück. Aufzeichnungen aus Deutschland 1945-1949'", in Bernt Engelmann (ed.), *Eine Pen-Dokumentation, Literatur des Exils*, München 1981, 127.

³ Hilde Spiel, *The Dark and the Bright, Memoirs 1911-1989*, tr. Christine Shuttleworth, Riverside 2007, 151.

it was because Britain and America had realised the strategic importance of Germany in the Cold War. In 1946 it was by no means clear that Germany would be granted any sort of cultural or economic strength or autonomy. The story of Europe and Germany in the 1950s would become the story of the Cold War, but we should be wary of reading the immediate postwar years retrospectively. I will interpret the four years after the war as a period between World War and Cold War, exploring the role of Spender, Spiel and de Mendelssohn in shaping the idea of a reconstructed Europe and in opening the channels for Anglo-German cultural exchange.

The Idea of Germany in Wartime Britain

In May 1940 the British government interned almost thirty thousand Germans and Austrians.⁴ A large proportion of these, including Hilde Spiel's father, were Jewish refugees from the Third Reich. For liberal intellectuals in Britain, it became urgent to reassure the refugees that not everyone in Britain had so narrow-minded a view of the Germans, and to encourage a more nuanced view of the German exiles on the part of their fellow British citizens. Exiled German writers such as Spiel and de Mendelssohn had the task of attempting to integrate into what seemed to be a hostile society, at the same time as solving the more urgent need for work and shelter.

Storm Jameson and the other members of the PEN club led the way in making the German exiles feel at home in Britain. Hilde Spiel later expressed her gratitude to the English PEN club for offering émigré writers "every kind of help, and something that came close to a feeling of being at home".⁵ In February 1939, Jameson welcomed fifty refugees to a party in London, expressing her belief that "In art, literature, there are no frontiers" and that the German writers could be the "friends" and "brothers" of the English writers, co-existing in a space that "is England, and [...] also Europe".⁶ A month after the war had broken out, Rudolf Olden, secretary of the German Exile Group of PEN, gave a speech announcing that "this is not a war between Britain and Germany; this is not a war between nations, but a war against an evil principle – a war for

⁴ See Richard Dove (ed.), *"Totally un-English"? Britain's Internment of "Enemy Aliens" in Two World Wars*, Amsterdam 2005.

⁵ Spiel, *The Dark and the Bright*, 107.

⁶ Heinz Stroh, "P.E.N. Party for Refugee Writers", in: *PEN News*, 102, February 1939, 4.

good principles – the principles of the PEN association”.⁷ In July 1940, when the bombing had begun in earnest, Storm Jameson circulated a letter to the neutral press of the world stating that the English were “fighting for the people of every nation” and in August 1941 she announced to the various PEN societies exiled in London that their “different languages are only dialects of one language, the language of men who respect each other”.⁸

Welcomed by the English PEN centre, a handful of German exiles came to play a key role in the organisation, with several speaking at the international congress held, with defiant “Britain can take it” spirit, in London as the bombs fell in September 1941. Here, Peter de Mendelssohn gave a talk entitled “Writers Without Language”, conveying to the British how difficult it was for the exiled writers to continue their line of work when their main “capital” – their language – was taken away.⁹ He saw the writers dividing between refugees, who would wait out the war before they could resume their craft, and émigrés, who would take on English as their new language. Erika Mann, attending the congress from her exile in America, saw this literary European cooperation as something to hold up to American hecklers who suggested that “Hitler has united the Continent and that Germany is Europe”. “How can Germany be Europe”, she asked, “when I have seen with my own eyes that Europe is in London?”¹⁰

As the war progressed, and people became more hopeful that the Allies would win, albeit at great cost, British writers began to confront the task that lay ahead in transforming Germany. Here Storm Jameson worried that the dialect of Nazi Germany might turn out to be incompatible with the language of men who respect each other. Although there was no doubt that the Germans had the same “animal nature” as the British, she found that they had a dangerous propensity for obedience that had made it easy to support Hitler: “they enjoy being told what to do so well that they cannot help admiring a brutal sergeant-major”.¹¹ The Germans emerge from this account as a race of children, who have “admira-

⁷ “Nora Waln and Rudolf Olden at the November Lunch”, in: *PEN News*, 107, November 1939, 4.

⁸ “European Centres in London”, in: *PEN News*, 119, August 1941, 4.

⁹ Peter de Mendelssohn, “Writers Without Language”, in: Hermon Ould (ed.), *Writers in Freedom, A Symposium*, London 1941, 92.

¹⁰ Erika Mann, “Germany Today and Tomorrow”, in: Ould, *Writers in Freedom*, 84.

¹¹ Storm Jameson, *The End of This War*, P.E.N. Books, London 1941, 32, 21.

ble qualities” of energy and obedience, but who, without proper supervision, can be “a murderous nuisance”.¹²

Jameson was not alone in this attitude towards Germany. In Erika Mann’s congress speech she dismissed all the Germans who had remained in Germany: “their minds are poisoned, they are mentally ill”. However, there were still some writers in Britain who saw the Germans as capable of non-Nazi thought. Unlike Jameson, who saw “Pan-Germanism” as “deeply settled in German tradition”, Stephen Spender announced in 1943 that: “Through their own German language and music, the Germans may perhaps be taught how far they have strayed from their deepest national tradition”.¹³ He insisted that the Germans should be taught through their own literature, and that future British occupiers should overcome the “striking” current neglect of German literature before attempting to re-educate the Germans. Spender himself kept up a steady stream of articles on Germany during and after the war, reminding British readers of the greatness of German literature and its influence on English literature. And after the war some of his articles and poems were reprinted in translation in a German magazine, offering the possibility of literary self-respect to a nation now largely devoid of hope.¹⁴

Recording the German Ruins

Returning from Germany at the end of 1945, Spender recorded his experiences in the occupied nation first in an article in his own magazine, *Horizon*, and then in book form in *European Witness* (1946). Here he recalled travelling home from Berlin with a British foreign correspondent who claimed “that he had many excellent stories which his paper refused to publish, about the desperate conditions in Berlin”.¹⁵ Immediately after the war, between twelve and fifteen million expelled German refugees began to stream into Berlin from Central Europe with no prospect of food and shelter and Fleet Street refused to enlighten a British public who

¹² Jameson, *The End of This War*, 31.

¹³ Jameson, *The End of This War*, 20; Spender, “Hoelderlin, Goethe and Germany”, in: *Horizon*, 46, October 1943, 273.

¹⁴ See for example Stephen Spender, “The Influence of Rilke on English Poetry”, in: *The Listener*, 18 July 1946, 84–5, reprinted in German translation in: *Neue Anslese*, 10, October 1946, 21–5.

¹⁵ Stephen Spender, *European Witness*, London 1946, 144.

had little sympathy for the nation who had recently been dropping bombs on their heads.¹⁶

By the time *European Witness* was published, the newspapers had finally allowed the story to break. In June 1945, the publisher Victor Gollancz, who would become one of the most vociferous advocates for the German cause in postwar Britain, managed to publish an article in the *Manchester Guardian*, raging against the callousness displayed by the Czechs towards the Germans they were evicting and wondering whether the “Nazi spirit” had infected the victors.¹⁷ Two months later, the foreign correspondent Norman Clark announced in the *News Chronicle* that “Here in Berlin we are living under this shadow, not just of hunger and want, but of death, and epidemics on a scale that the world has not seen in recorded history”.¹⁸ Charles Bray maintained in the *Daily Herald* that “if we are to prove to the German race, that our methods, our civilization, our creed were right and theirs wrong [...] then these problems have got to be solved and have got to be solved quickly”.¹⁹

In the five years after the war, recording the suffering of the German people and the scale of destruction of the German cities became an urgent humanitarian task for British writers hoping to overcome the insularity of postwar Britain. Spender’s *Horizon* “Rhineland Journal” provided a detailed survey of the effects of both Nazism and war, physically and spiritually. The journal opens with Spender arriving in Cologne, one of the most damaged towns in Germany, and realising for the first time “what total destruction meant”.²⁰ He finds that the blackened windows in the surviving facades look “like the opened mouth of a charred corpse”, and, continuing with the corpse metaphor, that the inhabitants of the city seem to be “parasites sucking at a dead carcass, digging among the ruins for hidden food” (395). In the conclusion of the article, he insists on the possibility of the “good German”, stating that there had been Germans who feared a German victory “almost as much as the enemies of Germany” (411). As though to illustrate this possibility, Spender and Cyril Connolly published this article beside an account of the final year of the

¹⁶ See Matthew Frank, “The New Morality – Victor Gollancz, ‘Save Europe Now’ and the German Refugee Crisis, 1945–56”, in: *Twentieth Century British History*, 17, 2006, 230–56. The subsequent Gollancz newspaper articles are all sourced from Frank.

¹⁷ Victor Gollancz, “Sudeten Germans and Other Things”, in: *Manchester Guardian*, 6 July 1945.

¹⁸ Norman Clark, “25,000 Seek Food Every Day”, in: *News Chronicle*, 24 August 1945.

¹⁹ Charles Bray, “Retribution”, in: *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1945.

²⁰ Stephen Spender, “Rhineland Journal”, in: *Horizon*, 72, December 1945, 392–412, here 395. All subsequent page numbers will refer to this edition.

war by a non-Nazi German, who records the constant “fear of losing everything, including life” and the experience of constant surveillance, offered no “pockets of air” from the Gestapo.²¹

Spender’s account found a receptive audience in a British public that was gradually waking up to the horrors continuing in Europe. On 27 August Victor Gollancz had published a letter in the *News Chronicle* arguing that only “an act of genuine repentance” could save Europe from “utter destruction” and that the European community was morally obliged to feed Europe, remembering that “a man is a man first, and a German, a Czech, or a Pole, a long way afterwards”.²² William Beveridge, the economist partially responsible for Britain’s burgeoning welfare state, immediately expressed his agreement with Gollancz, insisting that “demanding unconditional surrender means becoming responsible for the State of Germany”.²³ A month later, Gollancz began a “Save Europe Now” campaign, urging members of the British public to send him a card agreeing to a cut in rations for the sake of the starving Germans, and received 5000 cards by the first post. Over the next few years, Gollancz published a series of books broadcasting the situation in Germany, culminating in his January 1947 *On Darkest Germany*, comprised of a series of harrowing photographs of the starving German refugees and the inadequate slums in which they were attempting to exist. Here readers are presented with the emaciated bodies and rotting shoes of German people, and shown the corpse-like ruins described by Spender.

Despite occasional differences, Gollancz was joined in his efforts by his friend Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman* magazine, who published monthly reports from writers with first-hand experience of occupied Germany. Martin himself wrote a series of article in the magazine, bemoaning the “disastrous” food cuts and, more poetically, deciding that Dali would be the painter best placed to depict the German ruins.²⁴ Perhaps the most comprehensive account of the ruins published in the *New Statesman* was by Peter de Mendelssohn, in July 1945. Returning to his former homeland, the German writer finds that he has no vocabulary to record the total destruction he faces in the “white sea of rubble, faceless and featureless in the bright sunlight” in which the

²¹ Fl. Trismegistes, “Berlin 1944-1945”, in: *Horizon*, 72, December 1945, 385-94, here 385-6, 388.

²² Victor Gollancz, “In Germany Now”, in: *News Chronicle*, 27 August 1945.

²³ See Frank, “The New Morality”, 9.

²⁴ Kingsley Martin, “Hungry Germany” and “A German Diary”, in: *New Statesman*, 31 and 790, 13 and 27 April 1946, 260, 297.

bleached white bones of the dead form the “sprawling skeleton of a giant animal”.²⁵

De Mendelssohn himself, though ambivalent about his former countrymen, was an important figure in informing the British public about postwar Germany, both through his own journalism and through his championing of the emerging postwar German literature. In his wartime “Writers Without Language” talk he suggested that in the world after the war the refugees and the émigrés would “have to link their hands across the narrow spaces of water” and in a sense, he took on this task single-handedly, combining the roles of returned refugee and British émigré.

One of de Mendelssohn’s major contributions to the British understanding of the German cities and the postwar German mindset was his translation of Hermann Kasack’s 1947 *The City Beyond the River*. Here Kasack portrays a postwar German city as a ghost town, literally populated by the walking dead. The book opens with the hero, Robert, arriving in an unnamed ruined town where the houses have been reduced to ragged fronts, which stand ghost-like against the eerily blue sky. Attempting to live amidst the ruins, he soon realises the terrible truth, that the entire population of the city is also dead. Kasack goes further than most British writers in portraying postwar Germany as a form of hell, beyond the possibility of physical or spiritual redemption. In introducing Kasack’s novel to a British audience, de Mendelssohn illustrated the urgent need for a programme of reconstruction that, as Stephen Spender had proposed, would teach the Germans “how to overcome their despair and how to harness their guilt feelings to an active repentance” (413).

English Literature Goes to Germany: Peter de Mendelssohn in Berlin

Once they had surveyed the ruins that surrounded them, the British officials arriving in Germany set about physically and culturally reconstructing the country they had bombed. They began by throwing out Nazi culture, importing British culture to take its place. It became widely accepted that the German cultural scene had produced the conditions for Hitler’s rise to power and must be diluted with a hefty dose of “civilising” English culture. This was not simply the view of the English themselves. In a 1945 letter to her husband, Hilde Spiel admitted that the English had their faults compared to the Europeans (not least their sexual inhibitions)

²⁵ Peter de Mendelssohn, “Through the Dead Cities”, in: *New Statesman*, 14 July 1945.

but decided that “there is something so infinitely nobler in the English reticence” and announced that she had “no doubt where civilisation has reached its peak”.²⁶ British culture was also imported into the Allied zones on pragmatic grounds. It was natural that with English-speaking officials now comprising a large part of the audience for literature and theatre, much of it should be English. And inevitably, this tendency became more marked as Berlin became the capital of a cultural Cold War and the Allied officials sought to counteract the increasing influence of the Russian *Kulturbund*.

In his capacity as Allied press officer, Peter de Mendelssohn played an important role in informing the Germans about English literary culture. Both de Mendelssohn and Spiel had made the English language their own during the war, even taking the unusual step of switching to English for much of their literary work and personal correspondence. They both also chose to be members of the English PEN club (with de Mendelssohn serving on the committee from 1943) rather than joining the Austrian or German centre in exile. By 1941 they were naturalised British citizens and, surveying the bomb damage in Vienna after the war Hilde Spiel was able to look dispassionately at the city where she was born, insisting (in English that she would later translate into German) that “these bombs are not my own [...]. Mine extinguished one lovely Wren church after another, sailed over the London nursing home while my son was born”.²⁷ Her husband went further in dissociating himself from his former homeland, complaining that “ours is the shabbiest lot of all”, faced with “the dreadful, grey, hopeless task of going to reform my fellow countrymen, this band of thieves and murderers and abject criminals”.²⁸

A year later, in July 1945, de Mendelssohn would begin this undesired task, licensing newspapers for the American and then the British occupying governments. In 1946 he started *Der Telegraf* and *Die Welt* in the British zone, and in 1947 he began editing a new Berlin edition of *Die Welt*, clearly relishing the necessity of informing the Germans about English culture and current affairs. The newspaper contained daily articles about English books, plays, politics and even cities, many of which were written by de Mendelssohn and Spiel themselves. In October 1947 Hilde Spiel informed her readers that Dickens was a genius possessed of an “einzigartiger Humor” and commended the English winter landscape and

²⁶ Hilde Spiel, letter to Peter de Mendelssohn, 17 November 1945. Private collection.

²⁷ Hilde Spiel, “The Streets of Vineta, A Diary”, unpublished fragment, Spiel Archiv, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

²⁸ Peter de Mendelssohn, letter to Hilde Spiel, June 1944. Private collection.

the old London streets they would see in Lean's adaptation of *Great Expectations*.²⁹ A month later she helped them to understand English society, explaining the importance of sherry in the English comedy of manners, and in March 1948 she lauded the great tradition of English essays and lamented that it was difficult to translate V.S. Pritchett for the German reader because the German language was not subtle enough for prose.³⁰ Throughout 1948, Peter de Mendelssohn serialised his own translation of Churchill's memoirs and in August he wrote an article acclaiming the former British Prime Minister's skills in politics, war and writing.³¹

Reading through the issues of *Die Welt* in 1947 and 1948 it is hard not to feel ambivalent about these attempts at cultural exchange. Spiel's and de Mendelssohn's joyful enthusiasm for English literature seems heartfelt, and their knowledge is impressive. The more patronising elements of de Mendelssohn's mission are mitigated when we remember that he was simultaneously engaged in translating German literature for the English, and joining in the *New Statesman's* attempts to remind Britain of the plight of Germany. But there is still something distastefully colonial in this self-satisfied attempt at education and civilisation, which doesn't seem to be helped by the fact that the colonisers themselves were once natives; "we got out in time", they seem to say – "we were there, with Churchill, not here, with you". It also seems rather ludicrous to expect people surviving on half of the required calorie intake to think about culture at all. The former Prime Minister's sister, Clarissa Churchill, arriving in Berlin in 1946, was shocked to witness the "unnaturally elaborate cultural life" which had been "dragged to its feet" by the Allies for the benefit of the "shivering Germans".³² And de Mendelssohn himself was acutely aware of this, comparing the "atmosphere of artificial amusement and hectic gaiety amid towering ruins and depressing deadness" of 1945 Berlin to the 1929 inflation period.³³

De Mendelssohn's insistent touting of English culture also took its place, wittingly or unwittingly, in the Cold War. *Die Welt* was more even-handed to the Russians than American publications in the same era, but it

²⁹ "a unique humour"; Hilde Spiel, "Verfilmter Dickens", in: *Die Welt*, 9 October 1947.

³⁰ Hilde Spiel, review of Terence Rattigan's *Love in Idleness*, in: *Die Welt*, 6 November 1947; Hilde Spiel, review of V.S. Pritchett's essays, in: *Die Welt*, 27 March 1948.

³¹ Peter de Mendelssohn, endword to Churchill's memoirs, in: *Die Welt*, 12 August 1948.

³² Clarissa Churchill, "Berlin Letter", in: *Horizon*, 75, March 1946, 190.

³³ Peter de Mendelssohn, "German Journal: A Midsummer Nightmare", unpublished fragment quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *In A Cold Crater, Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin, 1945–1948*, Berkeley 1998, 22.

is nonetheless clear that English culture was offered in opposition to Russian as well as to German culture. In November 1947, a reporter announced that the British had forbidden the work of the *Kulturbund* in its sector, and lamented that it had become over-politicised, chastising its President Johann Becher for failing to take responsibility for its integrity.³⁴ A year later, “cold warrior” Melvin Lasky founded the international magazine *Der Monat*, intending to bring about a “democratic reorientation among Germans”, and for the editor, if not for his contributors, who included Hilde Spiel and Stephen Spender, European cultural exchange became part of a stockpiling of resources in a world “divided between socialism and capitalism”, totalitarianism and “freedom”.³⁵

Organising Europe

In June 1942, the PEN newsletter editorial stated that after the war it would fall upon PEN to reestablish “connections with the countries now cut off from free intercourse with the rest of the world”.³⁶ According to the writer, it was organisations such as PEN that would be responsible for spearheading the creation of a new European literature and, ultimately, for establishing a new European community. Between 1945 and 1950, PEN and Unesco worked in tandem, laying what the American writer Thornton Wilder would term the “foundations” of a “great work”.³⁷ And pro-European individuals like Spender, de Mendelssohn and Jameson gave energetic support to the two organisations, working on the basis of the credo set out in Unesco’s constitution: “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.³⁸

Unesco was established in November 1945 with a two-fold aim. It would “assist the free flow of ideas and information” across the world and “foster the growth within each country and in its relations with other countries” of educational and cultural programmes. According to Julian Huxley, who was appointed as the first Director General in December 1946, art had the potential to express, “as no other medium can do, the

³⁴ *Die Welt*, 11 November 1947.

³⁵ Advert for *Der Monat*, in: *PEN News*, 157, October 1948, 8; second quotation is from *Der Monat*, 26, 1950, 214.

³⁶ *PEN News*, 123, May-June 1942, 3.

³⁷ Thornton Wilder, “General Report”, in: Unesco, *The Artist in Modern Society, International Conference of Artists, Venice 22-28 September 1952*, Paris 1954, 122.

³⁸ Fernando Valderrama, *A History of UNESCO*, Paris 1995, 395.

spirit of society” and so could provide a safe outlet for nationalism.³⁹ It could bring pleasure and heal neurosis. The role of the new organisation was both to encourage the production of culture and to curb the growth of any dangerous intellectual tendencies; to make and to mend. Reconstruction could not begin without a thorough clearing away of the spiritual debris of Europe.

Here Huxley implicitly admits that the new organisation’s job will not be easy to discharge. It must contend with nationalism, neurosis and the threat of further wars. As an organisation, Unesco was more circumscribed in its efforts to create a new Europe than any individual writer could be, and it had to be careful in what it attempted and what it promised. As a result, Unesco’s early mission statements did not tend to resound with unrealistic optimism. What they did offer was a hope that world-wide renewal was possible, and that the defeated powers would soon have their own cultural autonomy. In this, Unesco offered an alternative to the Allied governments’ refusal to let the Germans have any voice at all; and coming from an organisation, this hope was far more powerful than it could be coming from a handful of individuals.

From the start, PEN and Unesco recognised their shared aims and attempted to work together in bringing together writers amidst the ruins. The June 1946 PEN Congress passed a resolution offering “full support” to the future of the new organisation and a year later Stephen Spender, now head of literature for Unesco, informed the Congress that Unesco’s problems were largely PEN’s problems; both were aiming to promote peace in the world.⁴⁰ As early as July 1945, the editors of the PEN newsletter were themselves pleased to see the European PEN centres “re-opening their doors” one by one and to see European visitors passing once again through London.⁴¹

The key players in the British PEN centre immediately recognised the necessity of opening up the organisation to the defeated nations. Even in the 1942 newsletter, after stating that PEN will have the task of reestablishing connections with isolated European countries after the war, the editorial goes on to say that PEN will be assisted by the Free German League of Culture. The writer insists that the existence of this League is “a reminder of a German culture that has nothing to do with Nazi Kultur”. Unsurprisingly, there were people involved in both the English PEN

³⁹ Julian Huxley, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and its Philosophy*, Washington 1948, 57.

⁴⁰ “P.E.N. and U.N.E.S.C.O.”, in: *PEN News*, 144, July 1946, 13; “UNESCO”, in: *PEN News*, 150, July 1947, 11.

⁴¹ *PEN News*, 139, July 1945, 3.

centre and the German centre in exile who were sceptical about reopening a centre in Germany after the war. Already in 1945, a new Italian PEN centre came into being in Rome, headed by the resistance writer, Ignazio Silone, and the London centre happily sent a “cable of welcome and congratulation” to the Italians.⁴² It would be two years before a new centre could form in Austria and three years before a centre would open in Germany.

The idea of a new German PEN centre was first mooted at the end of the war. In June 1945, the London centre gave a dinner to mark the termination of hostilities in Europe, attended by representatives from twenty countries. The literary critic Desmond MacCarthy, now president of the English centre, gave a speech, asking what could remain of the Germany he had once loved, given that Hitler had “destroyed the Reich” and the Germans, following him, had “murdered their mother Germany”. He provided the answer, insisting that German music, the German landscape and, crucially, the German language “will and must survive” and that it was PEN’s duty to enable this survival.⁴³ At the 1946 Congress, the German group put forward a resolution to start trying to establish a new German centre, and in December that year the PEN newsletter reported on Victor Gollancz’s “Save Europe Now” campaign, reminding their readers of the “appalling intellectual starvation” in the British zone in Germany. A year later the PEN Congress voted to reopen a new centre, opposed only by the Hebrew and Yiddish centres, and the editorial described the decision as “a triumph for the spirit of internationalism”.⁴⁴

Storm Jameson, recording the event in her autobiography, was more ambivalent, seeing the invitation as a “coldly polite” gesture made while the Germans were still weak and going against her own instincts, which were to make the Germans “wait on the doorstep for another year or two”.⁴⁵ For Jameson, no longer buoyed up by wartime morale, the idea of Germany was all very well, but the reality of a group of German writers who had in whatever way made peace with the Nazi regime was less palatable. Perhaps others felt that way, but nonetheless, in 1948, Peter de Mendelssohn addressed the Congress on behalf of the English centre and insisted that the twenty writers proposed to form the core of the new German centre (including Johann Becher and Hermann Kasack) were all credibly anti-Nazi and fully acceptable in all four zones of Germany.

⁴² “Italy”, in: *PEN News*, 139, July 1945, 5.

⁴³ “International Dinner”, in: *PEN News*, 139, July 1945, 7-14 (10).

⁴⁴ *PEN News*, 150, July 1947, 3.

⁴⁵ Storm Jameson, *Journey from the North*, London 1984, Vol. 2, 207.

Becher, addressing the Congress in a language he found it painful to employ when it was so “disgraced” by the Nazis, expressed his pleasure at the opening of the new centre and hoped that one day he could host the PEN Congress in Berlin, “der Hauptstadt [...] eines Deutschlands das endlich, endlich Frieden, Frieden und nichts als Frieden will”.⁴⁶

In 1947, Spender, lecturing on behalf of Unesco, announced that “all poets speak the same language”. His optimism about European cooperation here resonates with Storm Jameson’s hopeful wartime announcement that different languages are only dialects of one language but, coming in an era when writers were forced to confront the realities of postwar Europe, it fell on more cynical ears. The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, then partly financially supported by Spender, wrote disparagingly about the “same language” lecture in a letter, dismissing it as “a bloody lie: who talks Spender?”⁴⁷

Speaking in Spender’s Unesco lecture series, Jean-Paul Sartre pondered the question of political engagement in literature and decided that the postwar writer had a duty to “condemn injustice” and violence. For him, Unesco was necessary not because poets already spoke the same language, but because a European in a country like Nazi Germany had to find an audience in foreign countries “so as to make good his protests, his definitions”.⁴⁸ Sartre dismissed in particular writers who thought that either America or Russia were preparing a war, and kept silent, suggesting that their abnegation of responsibility may one day be seen as guilt.

Already, in 1947, questions of European reconstruction were becoming embroiled in the Cold War, and with it, the threat of further conflict. Spender himself was disillusioned with Unesco by the time he stepped down in 1947, outraged that Julian Huxley had not been elected because he was seen as too Red for the Americans. As far as Spender was concerned, Unesco would fail if it did not include Russia.⁴⁹ And meanwhile America itself had distanced itself from the organisation, demanding a loyalty from its citizens that excluded loyalty to Unesco.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Spender himself, together with Victor Gollancz, Kingsley

⁴⁶ “The capital of a Germany that finally, finally, wants peace, peace and nothing but peace”; “Re-establishment of the German Centre”, in: *PEN News*, 156, August 1948, 9.

⁴⁷ Quoted by Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, 238.

⁴⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Responsibility of the Writer”, in: *Reflections On Our Age, Lectures Delivered at the Opening Session of UNESCO at the Sorbonne University Paris*, London 1948, 83.

⁴⁹ Stephen Spender, “Can Unesco Succeed?”, in: *The Fortnightly*, 963, March 1947, 185-90, here 186.

⁵⁰ See William Preston Jr, Edward S. Herman and Herbert I. Schiller, *Hope and Folly, The United States and Unesco, 1945-1985*, Minneapolis 1989, 49.

Martin, Peter de Mendelssohn and Hilde Spiel, continued to campaign for a bridge of understanding between Britain and Germany. And it seems doubtful that without their efforts any sort of mutual understanding between German and British writers could have been possible. The dubiousness of the ends need not devalue the internationalism and European exchange taking place on the pages of *Die Welt*, or indeed of *Der Monat*. By 1950, the British and the Germans may not have spoken the same language, but they were at least speaking to each other, open to the possibility of dialogue.

Avant-Garde or Civil Service? Yves Klein, Werner Ruhnau and “The European Situation”

Noit Banai (Tufts University)

The purpose of this essay is to analyze the ways in which the collaboration between the French artist Yves Klein and the German architect Werner Ruhnau on the state-commissioned Gelsenkirchen Musiktheater (1957-1959), located in the Ruhr region not far from the border between France and Germany, participated in the formation of larger material and discursive networks of post-war European cultural production.¹ With the catastrophe of World War Two giving rise to new epistemological conditions, material circumstances, and constraints for artistic practice and political engagement, this essay’s immediate aim is to identify Gelsenkirchen’s particular resonances within the contemporaneous construction of the European Community while its broader goal is to locate the specific sites, discourses, and strategies that emerged as spaces of aesthetic-political mediation in the wake of the war. My central claim is that the primary challenge of post-war artistic practitioners was to imagine a uniquely European sphere whose identity was not yet given and to envision new publics, forms of sovereignty, and models of citizenship within it. At the crux of this issue was how to negotiate the traumatic legacy of World War Two and, more specifically, the problem of Franco-German reconciliation, which would serve as the basis for a European political body.

¹ This essay developed from my doctoral dissertation *Public Disorder: Yves Klein, 1945-1962*, Columbia University, 2007. I owe heartfelt gratitude to the insights of John Rajchman, Branden Joseph, Nan Rosenthal, David Freedberg and Tom McDonough, assistance of the Archives Yves Klein, contribution of Werner and Anita Ruhnau, the support and generosity of Andreas Koch at the Stadtarchiv Gelsenkirchen, and German translation skills of Christian Rattemeyer and Marc Glöde.

While most of the meagre scholarship on Gelsenkirchen has framed it as the catalyst for Klein's utopian *Air Architecture*,² my goal is to actively foreground this architectural-aesthetic collaboration as an equally radical and urgent political project. In their extensive correspondence, Klein hailed Gelsenkirchen the "merveilleuse situation Européene" (the marvelous European Situation),³ and proclaimed "vive le theatre de Gelsenkirchen, vive Ruhnau et la situation Européene" (long live Gelsenkirchen, long live Ruhnau and the European Situation)⁴; Ruhnau responded "Viele Grusse und es lebe die europäische Situation" (all best and long live the European Situation)⁵ and "Paris soll noch viel mehr von der 'Europäischen Situation' träumen" (Paris will only dream of the European Situation from now on).⁶ While surely indicative of the mutual admiration between artist and architect, these statements should not be dismissed as simplistic catch-phrases. Rather, by discursively eliding Gelsenkirchen with both the "European" and "International Situation" between 1957 and 1959, Klein and Ruhnau positioned the theater as an ambitious yet unresolved political project, one that negotiated the complex representations of the newly emerging construct of a united Europe as a geographic, economic, socio-political, and cultural entity. For the three years of their partnership, the theatre became an aesthetic laboratory whose construction generated some of the following questions: How can art and architecture contribute to working through the traumatic catastrophe of World War Two in order to generate a European consciousness? What would this consciousness feel like and what challenges would it face? How would the European citizen simultaneously maintain his or her individual national affiliation and participate in a supra-national or transnational body politic? What kind of public institutions and aesthetic strategies would need to emerge to mediate and sustain these complex identities and relationships?

While the duration and scope of the Gelsenkirchen project raised many issues relevant to this debate, this essay concentrates on two mutually intertwined performative instantiations through which the con-

² This line of scholarship most probably emerged from Yves Klein's own claim to have been the sole inventor of *Air Architecture* in the "The Chelsea Hotel Manifesto" (1961).

³ In a letter from Yves Klein to Werner Ruhnau, dated Thursday, November 1957. Published in the Museum of Wiesbaden exhibition catalogue *Wie das Gelsenkirchener Blau auf Yves Klein kam: Zur Geschichte der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Yves Klein und Werner Ruhnau*, Wiesbaden 2004, 41ff, here 41.

⁴ Letter from Werner Ruhnau to Yves Klein, November 21, 1957, 42.

⁵ Letter from Werner Ruhnau to Yves Klein, November 21, 1957, 42.

⁶ Letter from Werner Ruhnau to Yves Klein, November 29, 1957, 44.

traditions of Franco-German reconciliation could gain form and pave the way for the “European Situation”. First, the essay examines Klein’s formulation of an “aesthetics of collaboration”, which despite its ostensibly apolitical tenor was in remarkable dialogic relation to Jean-Paul Sartre’s still vivid pathological characterization of “collaboration” and which transformed it into an art practice that might give rise to a contemporary collective. Second, the essay considers Ruhnau’s conception of the “Bauhütte”, a hybrid notion of community and citizenship that combined the high modernist Bauhaus legacy with the pre-modern formation of the guild as well as the collective ideology of the communist Eastern bloc with the commercial imperatives of the capitalist West. As this double analysis reveals, while the Gelsenkirchen project affirmed that the reconstitution of the avant-garde was inextricably tied to the regeneration of Europe, it also raised the thorny issue of whether an alliance between art and politics – propelled by advanced capitalism and mediated by state-sponsored institutions – could end up as anything more than a form of cultural civil service.

The Gelsenkirchen Project and Kulturpolitik

Gelsenkirchen, a city bordering Essen in the Ruhr region, was at the center of Germany’s coal mining, machine manufacture, and glass production industries. Like many other cities in the Ruhr during the 1950s, it underwent massive reconstruction after its urban complex was destroyed by bombings and ground attacks in World War Two. In 1951, the municipal council held the first discussion⁷ in which they make mention of a theater, estimated at 4-5 million DM, which would become the nucleus of the city’s redevelopment program.⁸ As anticipated costs conspicuously mounted, the principal debates through the early 1950s centered on the moral justification of erecting a cultural edifice when basic material necessities such as housing, playgrounds, hospitals schools and other social services appeared more pressing. Press coverage from the period suggests that, to all intents and purposes, the municipal council were fighting an uphill battle against public opinion and that a compelling socio-political discourse had yet to be produced to win the support of a local populace who expected their government to attend to the city’s basic

⁷ In the minutes from the meeting of April 20, 1951, the discussion is slated as item four on the agenda. Stadtarchiv Gelsenkirchen. PR 1022.

⁸ “Theaterneubau auf der ‘Wiese?’”, in: *Westfälischen Rundschau*, June 19, 1951.

infrastructure. This, at least, is the impression one gets from a 1951 editorial:

Wir sind nicht so naiv, zu glauben, dass es in diesem Jahrzeit noch möglich sein wird, ein Theater in unserer Stadt zu bauen. Wir halten es sogar für eine Anmassung, einen solchen Gedanken zu hegen oder gar zu planen, solange Menschen noch in Nissenhütten leben, so lange noch in der Nähe des Zoos Menschen in Breterbaracken wohnen, solange noch Familien in einem Raum hausen, solange Kinder noch kein vernünftiges Bett haben. Es ist die Grundlage jeder echten Kultur, dass Menschen menschenwürdig wohnen und leben. Solange es nicht möglich ist, diese Zustände zu beseitigen, sollte man es stickte ablehnen, Hirngespinsten nach zu jagen [...]. Kulturpolitik muss sein, aber sie muss aus der ethischen Verantwortung heraus kommen, das soziale Gefüge der gesellschaftlichen Ordnung so zu bauen, dass jeder Mensch ohne die peinigende Sorge um einen Platz, auf den er sein Haupt legen kann, daran Anteil hat.⁹

In the post-war German context, the term *Kulturpolitik* signified "all measures taken to influence culture through the state and municipality, through churches and parties, through unions and industrial plants, through clubs and associations".¹⁰ It seems that the politicization of culture under the Third Reich laid the groundwork for both an acceptance and wariness of such an association and that, to a certain degree, it was expected that the theater would deploy *Kulturpolitik* as a new ethical authority. It appears, however, that a convincing cultural political framework was still crucially missing when the Münster-based team of H. Deilmann, M.C. von Hausen, Ortwin Rave and Werner Ruhnau won the official competition in September 1954 at a projected cost of 15 million DM.¹¹ Protests continued in February 1955 when the BHE (Gesamtdeutscher Block) rallied 37 people to demonstrate against the expensive theater.¹² Before the foundation stone was laid in June 1956,

⁹ "We are not so naive to think that it would be possible to construct a theater in our city within this decade. We rather consider it preposterous to carry such ambitions or to act on their plans as long as people live in huts, as long as people live in shacks near the Zoo, as long as families have to live in one-room quarters, as long as children don't have proper beds. It is the foundation of all real culture that its people live and dwell with dignity. As long as it is not possible to change these conditions, one should strictly reject to chase phantasmagorias...Cultural politics is necessary, but it has to arrive out of the ethical responsibility to construct the order of the social fabric in such a way that each man can have a part in it without having to fear for a place to rest his head". See "Gaukelspiel um den Theaterbau", in: *Buerschen Volkszeitung*, June 6, 1951.

¹⁰ Ernst Fraenkel & Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Staat und Politik*, Frankfurt am Main 1957, 172.

¹¹ "Theaterneubau Entwürfe präsentieren sich", in: *Buerschen Volkszeitung*, September 17, 1954.

¹² "BHE protestiert gegen Theaterneubau", in: *Westfälischen Rundschau*, February 12, 1955.

Ruhnau greatly modified the wining proposal to curtail costs (most prominently reducing the three-tier theater to two tiers), but the theater would still end up costing the city of Gelsenkirchen 18-19 million DM.¹³

Ruhnau's eventual design, greatly influenced by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and the International Style, was based on the ideal of viewer integration and participation. Made primarily of glass and steel, the white hard-edged, box-like outer structure houses a large, circular auditorium (*Grosses Haus*) meant for operas and musical comedies with overhanging balconies extending forward toward the stage and a uniform black color scheme optically connecting all spatial elements. The auditorium, seating up to 1100 people, is accessed through a large glass-enclosed rotunda in the main lobby whose transparency echoes the glass on the building's front façade. As Ruhnau recalls, his strategy was to extensively use glass as an "invisible curtain-wall" in order to unhinge the traditional notion of perspective, break down boundaries between interior and exterior, and make "the theatergoers, seen from the city, actors themselves".¹⁴ Period photographs show that the building was conceived to seamlessly connect with the urban fabric and the city's main artery of tramways and roads rather than functioning as a discrete, enclosed space. A second, small theater (*Kleines Haus*), with a capacity of approximately 400-450 people, which Ruhnau describes as a "scenic workshop", was designed for experimental productions in a connecting lateral building. It was structurally more flexible, with variable seating, platforms, and lighting techniques that could create different performance conditions. Both these theaters were supported by a common cloakroom, offices and studios.

Once this basic design was determined, Ruhnau invited Norbert Kricke, a Düsseldorf based sculptor, and Yves Klein, a young painter of monochromes he had met in Paris in March 1957, to act as principal members of the artistic team before announcing the competition for the decoration of the theater on May 31, 1957. By the end of the competition, June 1957, the group included Robert Adams, an English sculptor living in London, and Paul Dierkes, a German sculptor living in West Berlin. Jean Tinguely, the Swiss sculptor-bricoleur and on-site German translator for Klein, joined the group in November 1958.¹⁵ The interface between

¹³ "Der eiserne Vorhang ist schon gefallen", in: *Westfälischen Rundschau*, January 10, 1959.

¹⁴ See Werner Ruhnau: *Der Raum, Das Spiel und Die Künste*, Berlin 2007, 149. Subsequent quote from same page.

¹⁵ Background information about the city of Gelsenkirchen, the general outline of the competition, and basic information about the construction process, including the unbuilt proposal for *Air Architecture*, can be found in: Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein*, Stuttgart 1984, 107-30.

aesthetic and bureaucratic ambition was often tense, with the commission's displeasure about the choice of a French artist making the ratification of his designs uncertain and both budgetary and design issues a constant matter of contention.¹⁶ Ultimately, Robert Adams made a geometric relief that decorated the box office hall, Paul Dierkes crafted white plaster reliefs that covered the rounded auditorium hall, Jean Tinguely constructed rotating, sculptural mobiles of gray velour for the lobby of the small auditorium, and Norbert Kricke contributed steel reliefs for the small auditorium's outside wall (his plans for 'water columns' made of Plexiglas were never built). Most prominently, Yves Klein produced six huge works on site: two large blue monochromes with ingrained ripple effects (7 x 20 meters) for the eastern and western side walls of the main lobby and four blue sponge reliefs, two placed along the rear wall of the main lobby (5 x 10 meters) and two situated above the lower level cloakroom (3 x 9 meters). Upon its inauguration on December 15, 1959, an entire issue of the *Gelsenkirchener Blätter*, a local gazette, was dedicated to the "Neues Theater im Revier", as it was officially called, and the *Deutsche Bauzeitung* lauded it as having "no equivalent".¹⁷

"The European Situation"

It was not until November of 1957, when Ruhnau and Klein started collaborating in earnest, that the socio-political framework of the "European Situation" became the theater's *raison d'être* in their private communication and one would have assumed that they would wish to disseminate this radical elision widely. Klein, at least, was notoriously provocative and his status as avant-garde artist had recently benefited from confounding the expectations of the public at his *Epoca Blu* exhibition at the Galleria Apollinaire in Milan (January 12-22, 1957). Thus, Klein and Ruhnau's silence speaks volumes and we can only conjecture that both were deeply aware that the public commission at Gelsenkirchen was a playing field whose rules of engagement were not parallel to those of the art world. The fact that they kept the "European Situation" an exclusive designation used only among the members of the artistic team suggests an understanding of the complexity involved in achieving their

¹⁶ The challenges of the building process are extensively documented in *Werner Ruhnau: Bankunst*, Bonn 1992; *Wie das Gelsenkirchener Blau auf Yves Klein Kam* and *Werner Ruhnau: Der Raum, Das Spiel und Die Künste*.

¹⁷ *Deutsche Bauzeitung: Fachzeitschrift Für Architektur und Bautechnik*, Dezember-Januar 1960, 686.

project as avant-garde practitioners under the watchful gaze of public opinion and the financial authority of government institutions. Apparently, despite valuing the symbolic cachet of the avant-garde, neither the post-war public nor the municipal bureaucracy was ready for a financially exorbitant state-funded building articulated in such far-reaching activist terms. Nevertheless, there is something to be said about the fact that this 'international' aesthetic collaboration of Western European artists occurred only twelve years after the end of the war in the highly politically and economically charged geographic location of the Ruhr. France was dependent on the Ruhr for the majority of its coal supply and the region signified French vulnerability to renewed German armament through the latter's industrial strength.¹⁸ Building a public theater in this area conspicuously associated it with the problem of post-war European cultural reconstruction and highlighted the importance of aesthetic production as a channel through which to transform the enmity between France and Germany into a functioning alliance that could serve as the cornerstone for a secure Europe. While various glimmers of European consciousness existed since the mid 19th century, the desire for European unity emerged in earnest after World War Two.¹⁹ The imperative, in very general terms, was to implement defense, economic, and cultural mechanisms that would surpass the disagreements between individual nation states, guarantee against the future threat of a revitalized Germany, and prevent another continental conflict. Without being too reductive, a tension that had been simmering since the war's end came to the fore in the ratification of the Treaty of Rome in March 1957, which combined the ideas of an atomic

¹⁸ Before the Yalta conference in February 1945, Charles De Gaulle told the Allies "France is very clear on the problem of the Rhine, the Rhine is French Security". Quoted in *L'Année Politique, 1944-1945*, Paris 1946, 101, my translation. In a speech delivered at Baden Baden on October 5, 1945, De Gaulle went on to say that "The Ruhr is both a gauge and an instrument. It is a gauge because without it, Germany will not be able to arise, and, once again, threaten, attack, and invade us. It is an instrument for the reconstruction of Western Europe [...] an instrument for the reconstruction that must help France to become an important industrial power, a goal that it cannot reach without the contribution of this mineral basin". Quoted in Gérard Bossuet, *Les Fondateurs de L'Europe Unie*, Paris 2001, 75, my translation.

¹⁹ The bibliography on the construction of Europe is extensive. Some comprehensive sources include Serge Bernstein and Pierre Milza, *Histoire de l'Europe contemporaine, le XX^{ème} siècle de 1919 à nos jours*, Paris 1992; Marie Thérèse Bitsch, *Histoire de la construction européenne*, Brussels 2001; Gérard Bossuet, *Les fondateurs de l'Europe unie*, Paris 2001; Henri Brugmans, *L'idée européenne 1920-1970*, Bruges 1970; Elisabeth Du Reau, *L'idée d'Europe au XX^{ème} siècle*, Brussels 1996; Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire*, Paris 1965; René Girault (ed.), *Identité et conscience européenne au XX^{ème} siècle*, Paris 1994; Philippe Mioche, *De l'idée européenne à l'Europe, XIX-XX siècle*, Paris 1997; Gérard Soulier, *L'Europe – Histoire, civilisation, institutions*, Paris 1994.

community and a common market and laid the groundwork for the European Economic Community (EEC) in January 1959, and Charles De Gaulle's election to President of France's Fifth Republic in December 1958. If the forces of federal (supra-national) integration were represented by the EEC, De Gaulle's return to power reaffirmed the protection of the nation state as the primary unit of power and foregrounded the relationship between France and Germany as the political hub upon which transnational European citizenship would be built.

This aspiration of reconstructing Europe through Franco-German rapprochement as it was shaped in official, public discourse was not a stable, monolithic reality, but a quasi-mythical ideal constituted through a plurality of conflicting representations. "Europe" was a fiction, and as Louis Terrenoire, one of De Gaulle's closest collaborators warned, "you are going to integrate Germany into this fiction".²⁰ Similarly, the "European Situation" at Gelsenkirchen was a constantly emerging and shifting experiment in which various discursive, representational, and material points of pressure converged and diverged to produce a set of paradoxical fictions. It would be misleading, therefore, to suggest that the Gelsenkirchen project was a mere reflection of the historical situation or to try and secure direct and equivalent lines of causality or communication between aesthetics and politics, both equally fraught with inconsistencies, ambiguities, and paradoxes. Gelsenkirchen's fictions of Europe did not directly impinge on the political realm in which, for example, Charles De Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer made momentous historical decisions, but they were nonetheless political to the degree that every aesthetic utterance projects an imagined world. At Gelsenkirchen, the problem of the relation of each citizen to the nation, the nation to the larger construct of the European polity, and the challenge of constructing a European *demos* was most vividly visualized through Yves Klein's "aesthetics of collaboration" and Werner Ruhnau's "Bauhütte".

An Aesthetics of Collaboration

Klein's negotiation of the ambiguous European ideal was through an "aesthetics of collaboration", which would mediate between the particular

²⁰ The original statement by Louis Terrenoire was published in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats de l'Assemblée Nationale*, November 24, 1949, 6251-4. It is quoted in Simon Serfaty, *France, De Gaulle and Europe: The Policy of the Fourth and Fifth Republics Toward the Continent*, Baltimore 1968, 14.

ego of each artist and the larger, shared achievement of the artwork in order to surpass the category of Art and become a social praxis for the establishment of a collective.²¹ His most lucid presentation of the subject occurred at the opening of Jean Tinguely's exhibition in Düsseldorf in January 1959, while both artists were still actively working at Gelsenkirchen, and it is important to quote the salient passages in their entirety and maintain Klein's capitalized emphasis on specific words:

Je voudrais proposer à tous ceux qui voudront bien entendre: la COLLABORATION! Mais attention à l'étymologie même du mot. Collaborer veut dire exactement travailler en commun à un même ouvrage. L'ouvrage pour lequel je propose la collaboration, c'est l'Art! Dans l'Art, l'Art sans problématique, se trouve la source de VIE intarissable par laquelle, si nous sommes de vrais artistes, libéré de l'imagination rêveuse et pittoresque du domaine psychologique, qui est le contre-espace, l'espace du PASSÉ, nous atteindrons à la vie éternelle, à l'Immortalité [...]. Les artistes qui collaborent sont ceux qui travaillent avec le cœur et la tête! Ce sont des artistes qui savent ce que c'est que la RESPONSABILITÉ d'être un HOMME vis-à-vis de l'UNIVERS! [...] En proposant la Collaboration dans l'art [...] Je propose en fait de dépasser l'art lui-même et de travailler individuellement au retour à la vie réelle.²²

While making no explicit allusions to World War Two, Klein's emphatic reference to responsibility along with the overt directive to heed collaboration's etymology and free oneself from the tainted past nevertheless takes on the existential overtones of Jean-Paul Sartre and the committed left wing French intelligentsia. Sartre, of course, was responding to the

²¹ Nan Rosenthal was the first to point to Klein's repeated use of this highly charged word in his public addresses of 1959. She notes that the original manuscript of the Sorbonne lectures refers frequently to the word "collaboration", while the typescript has been methodically changed to more benign words such as "la coopération", "association de l'effort", and "la création en commun". The final spoken address, which was tape-recorded, contains no mention at all of the word "collaboration". See *The Blue World of Yves Klein*, Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1976, 218-9.

²² Yves Klein, "Discours prononcé à l'occasion de l'exposition Tinguely a Dusseldorf (janvier 1959)", in : *Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art et autres écrits*, Paris 2001, 102-3. ("I would like to propose to all those who would like to listen: COLLABORATION! But pay attention to the etymology of the word. Collaboration precisely means laboring together on the same work. The work for which I propose collaboration is Art! In an Art without problematics, one can find the source of untainted life by which, if we are real artist – liberated of dream-like and picturesque imagination of the psychological realm, which is the contra-space, the space of the past – we reach eternal life and immortality [...] Artists who collaborate are those who work with their heart and mind! These are artists who understand RESPONSIBILITY of being a MAN vis-à-vis the UNIVERSE [...] By proposing Collaboration in art, I propose, in fact, to surpass art itself and to work individually on the return to real life".)

historical concept of collaboration, which was born on October 24, 1940 at a meeting between Adolf Hitler and Maréchal Philippe Pétain at Montoire. Six days after the meeting, Pétain announced on French radio that, "A collaboration had been envisaged between our two countries. I have accepted the principle of it. The collaboration must be sincere".²³ This formal acceptance is at the origin of the modern definition of collaboration as a political arrangement between two nations and, more specifically, a co-operation between Nazi occupiers and Fascist factions or individuals among the native population. While collaboration was deeply ingrained and diffused at the administrative level of the Vichy government, most of the immediate post-war debates focused on what should be done with individual collaborators. As is well established, Sartre was active in the *Comité d'épuration de l'édition* (Committee for Purging Publishers), which specifically pursued collaborationist writers and publishers, as well as a member of the *Comité national des écrivains* (National Committee of Writers), which was responsible for issuing the "Manifesto of French Writers" (1944), urging apt judicial punishment for all intellectuals who had collaborated with the Nazis (resulting most famously in the trial and death by firing squad of author Robert Brasillach).²⁴ In August 1945, Sartre published "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur", a diagnosis of collaboration that did much to fortify the mythic image of the French Resistance and marginalize the occurrence of collaboration by characterizing it as an individual pathology.²⁵ Much like suicide or criminality, the propensity to collaborate, Sartre argued, is present in every collectivity. When the right social conditions are present, a person or social body (mostly deviants, foreigners, and marginal types) is "occupied" by the abject ideas and interests of others and will act out upon this urge as a kind of "disassimilation" from the indigenous culture. "Collaboration", Sartre writes, "is a fact of disintegration [...]. It represents at its origin a consolidation by collective foreign forms of elements ill assimilated by the indigenous community".²⁶ In other words, and in defense of

²³ "une collaboration a été envisagée entre nos deux pays. J'en ai accepté le principe". Text of address in Jean-Pierre Azema, *La Collaboration 1940-1944*, Paris 1975.

²⁴ Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach*, Chicago 2000.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur", in : *La République Française*, New York 1945, reprinted in his collection *Situations III*, Paris 1949, 43-61.

²⁶ Sartre, "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur", 46, my translation. The original reads: "En réalité, la collaboration est un fait de désintégration, elle a été dans tous les cas une décision individuelle, non une position de classe. Elle représente à l'origine une fixation par des formes collectives étrangères d'éléments mal assimilés par la communauté indigène. C'est en cela qu'elle se rapproche de la criminalité et du suicide qui sont aussi des phénomènes de désassimilation".

French wartime activities, collaboration is not a widespread condition, but a marginal form of behavior provoked by foreign influences (i.e. German). The only solution, according to Sartre, is to rebel against and purge this abjection from the social body in a national revolution and restore France to its lost unity.

More than a decade after the war, it is well worth asking if there was any real or symbolic power to Klein's recuperation, recycling, and rebranding of the French sentiment of shame and self-recrimination into a morally positive, universally accessible act.²⁷ The question is especially pertinent since, by the late 1950s, 'collaboration' had transmuted into a bevy of less historically burdened expressions (i.e., cooperation, association, integration) to mediate Franco-German relations that climaxed in the signing of the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between De Gaulle and Adenauer in 1963.²⁸ I argue that Klein's choice of this politically loaded and provocative word as the basis for an aesthetic strategy, delivered by a French artist to a German audience on German soil in the years surrounding the construction of the European Union and its debates about Franco-German rapprochement, could not have been happenstance. While undoubtedly evoking the prewar utopian aspirations of the Bauhaus and the post-war hopes for national reconciliation, the word "collaboration" was irretrievably contaminated by its political instrumentalization during World War Two. Indeed, Klein mobilized "collaboration" precisely because the word could not have been purged of all its historically specific meaning and was thus lodged on both sides of a historical divide. Even as it became a utopia-tinged, morally laudable process for the benevolent reconstruction of Europe, it also retained its morally repugnant connotations as an act that one could never imagine oneself participating in if one's politics were correct, especially in hind-

²⁷ Nan Rosenthal argues that "Klein's proposal to collaborate in art" was an "attempt by fiat to efface the collaboration in World War II, that is, as an attempt to turn the ambiguous and inevitably guilt-producing collaboration that Sartre described into something moral [...]. His attempt, however, also has the effect of raising the very subject it wished to paint over, or forget, or make disappear into a void of history which never happened" (See *The Blue World of Yves Klein*, 216). Developing this basic premise, I contend that Klein's insertion and effacement of the word 'collaboration' in the French context (the Conference at the Sorbonne, June 1959) and German context (Gelsenkirchen) needs to be differentiated in terms of the specific power relations that it deployed and negotiated in each country.

²⁸ See, for example, Charles de Gaulle's Address of November 3, 1959 quoted and translated in Roy C. Macridis (ed.), *De Gaulle, Implacable Ally*, New York 1966, 134: "The Great Powers need to unite on the basis of co-operation in which each carries its own load, rather than on the basis of integration in which peoples and governments find themselves deprived of their roles and responsibilities".

sight with full knowledge of both the Bauhaus' demise upon Hitler's assumption of power and the *épuration* (purge) that gripped France immediately after the war.²⁹

Within Klein's paradigm, collaboration led to a strange conundrum for a German spectator at Gelsenkirchen, as he or she was both encouraged to collaborate and was potentially humiliated, alienated, and in Sartre's judgment, rendered a "marginal, maladjusted element" by the thought of doing so. Being put in the shoes of a collaborator meant living in a condition of crisis or, as Klein writes, those who collaborate "are paradoxically united and separated at the same time".³⁰ To be sure, Klein urges artists to continue speaking in the first person within the framework of collaboration ("Me, I, MY, MINE ..., etc. and not the hypocritical WE, OUR ... But that, only after having solemnly signed the pact of COLLABORATION ..."). This articulation posits collaboration as an internally conflicted, heterogeneous experience of identification and refusal, a form of extreme violence to any notion of subjective or historical unity. If we extend this disjunctive state of collaboration to the political realm as the discursive site for Franco-German renewal, Klein's formulation implies that the shared historical burden of the war had to at least be acknowledged by both nations alike in order to imagine the rehabilitated French and German sovereignty necessary for a European consciousness.³¹ The artist's dedication to transforming aesthetic collaboration into

²⁹ For a comprehensive review of the *épuration*, see Michael Kelly, "The View of Collaboration during the 'Après-Guerre'", in: Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh (eds.), *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, New York 1989, 239-52; Herbert Lottman, *L'Épuration*, Paris 1986; Robert Aron, *Histoire de l'épuration*, Paris 1967-1975; Peter Novick, *The Resistance versus Vichy*, New York 1968.

³⁰ "Pour ces artistes prêts à la collaboration, IMAGINER, c'est s'absenter, c'est s'élancer vers une vie nouvelle. Dans leurs élans multiples dans toutes les directions et toutes les dimensions de leurs Vies constamment nouvelles, ils sont paradoxalement unis et séparés à la fois": Yves Klein, "Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art", in: *Le Dépassement*, 103.

³¹ In both France and Germany, there was much concern about maintaining national sovereignty. Throughout his political career, Charles de Gaulle famously insisted that "France must be France" and that its survival rests on the protection of both its physical territory and intellectual qualities. See Address of May 20, 1962, quoted in André Passeron, *De Gaulle Parle*, Vol. 2, Paris 1966, 198. France's entry into the European Community was always motivated by this spirit of protectionism, a fact confirmed by Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission, whose memoirs *La France par l'Europe* (1988) contain the following passage: "Creating Europe is a way of regaining that margin of liberty necessary for a 'certain idea of France'" (Quoted in Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe*, New York 1996, 14). In contrast, Germany's only hope to regain national sovereignty was its entry into the European Community, with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer calling the Schuman Plan "our breakthrough" and Karl Jaspers noting that,

a universally applicable praxis even compelled him to write a letter to Fidel Castro and offer suggestions for the constitution of a communal society in Cuba.³² Despite these rallying pronouncements, we may wonder what Klein was inviting the public to actually do or fabricate within Gelsenkirchen and with whom.

Examining the interior of the main lobby, we may imagine that the artist positioned the fragmented, blue sponge reliefs in close proximity to the unified blue monochromes, almost as a didactic lesson in collaboration. His conceptual approach to the sponges, developed during his 1956 exhibition at the Galerie Collette Allendy in Paris, is telling: “Thanks to sponges – savage, living material – I would be able to make portraits of the readers (*lecteurs*) of my monochromes, who after having seen, after having traveled in the blue of my paintings, will come back totally impregnated in sensibility like sponges”.³³ Hence, the sponge is at once a portrait, medium, and cognitive model for the correct way to experience the monochrome. If the ideal citizen of Europe is such a receptive “reader”, a bourgeois individual engrained with models and structures of narrative and can ‘absorb’ the monochromes and sponge reliefs as a storyline for collaboration, then Gelsenkirchen becomes akin to a public campaign geared towards the re-education of a German public who paid for the honor and duty of the transformation. In this fiction, each audience member was, in effect, buying a ticket to the theater in order to

“[Our] destiny today is that Germany can only exist in a United Europe, that the revival of her old glory can come about only through the Unification of Europe, that the devil with whom we will inevitably have to make our pact is the egoistic, bourgeois society of the French” (Judt, *A Grand Illusion?*, 15).

³² Klein’s letter to Fidel Castro is published in Alain Jouffroy, *Manifeste pour Yves Klein*, Paris 2006, 57. Jouffroy dates the letter to circa 1960-62, but it seems more probable that the letter dates even earlier, probably to 1959 when Castro was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Cuba and Klein was still very much involved in the collaborative work at Gelsenkirchen. The letter reads: “Cher Monsieur Castro, C’est avec enthousiasme que nous avons observé de loin malheureusement le succès de votre entreprise révolutionnaire, par le courage, l’audace, l’honnêteté pour une vie meilleure en collectivité et débarrassée le plus possible de la corruption. Avec tous nos vœux de complète et totale réussite, nous vous envoyons ci-joint le résultat de notre travail que je pense vous intéressera. Il s’agit d’idées sorties de notre groupe d’artistes, architectes, et chercheur de toutes les sortes. Nous recherchons les solutions aux problèmes de la collaboration dans la collectivité”.

³³ “Grâce aux éponges matière sauvage vivante, j’allais pouvoir faire les portraits des lecteurs de mes monochromes, qui, après avoir vu, après avoir voyage dans le bleu de mes tableaux en reviennent totalement imprégnés en sensibilités comme des éponges”. Yves Klein quoted in Rosenthal, *The Blue World of Yves Klein*, 142. Rosenthal cites “remarques sur quelques oeuvres exposées chez collette allendy” carbon of unpublished manuscript in Yves Klein Archives; handwritten version and other typewritten manuscripts also in Yves Klein Archives.

have a dramatic, existential encounter. With the building's glass carapace encouraging transparency, every gesture or thought occurring on the stage or the lobby was meant to emanate and extend outwards throughout the city to the greater structure of Germany and conglomeration of Europe.

It is at this interstice that the problematic relationship between post-war avant-garde practice and state-sponsored public projects comes to the fore. For, much like Europe was envisaged in terms of a common, regulated market, the universal currency at Gelsenkirchen was not just the Deutschmark, but also the monochromes and the sponge reliefs, which put the discursive codes of European citizenship into circulation. The financial transaction that animated this dissemination – the 18-19 million DM paid by the Gelsenkirchen Municipality for the construction of the theater and the price of an entry ticket – instituted a relationship in which cultural institutions intrude into, extract, and capitalize upon the realms of bourgeois subjectivity. The citizens' most hallowed right to autonomy and self-realization through contemplation thus seems to be integrated into a system whose goal is to guarantee its own survival through the maximization of profit; the relationship between the individual and the community of Europe appears to be mediated by a homogenizing, bureaucratic supra-national force whose goal is to absorb and regulate difference in the name of stability and order. Before the formulation of institutional critique in the 1960s, the Gelsenkirchen project already demanded whether an "aesthetics of collaboration" could be a successful tripartite, distributed dance between the artist, public, and institution or if the institution would inexorably supersede all other voices.

If collaboration was a fraught affair, the transparency of the building's glass façade and inner rotunda with its simultaneous connotations of participation and integration and surveillance and discipline, did not make things easier. Indeed, the location of the inner rotunda prevents an uninterrupted view of Klein's sponges and monochromes and transforms the lobby into what Josef Quetglas has termed a "palace of reflections".³⁴ Especially during an evening performance, responding to the contrast between the dark sky and the play between interior and exterior lights, viewers see themselves transformed into dark silhouettes. Rather than exact mirror images, these oxymoronic reflections reveal the voided presence of one's indistinct bodily armature hovering among and occasionally interconnecting with other faceless specters. The inner glass rotunda, lit from within, creates a third layer of reflection, which generates the effect of an endless bodily mise-en-abîme. Standing in the lobby, the

³⁴ Josef Quetglas, *Fear of Glass: Mies Van der Rohe's Pavilion in Barcelona*, Berlin 2001, 95.

theatergoer is caught between an external glass façade and an interior rotunda that unfaithfully reflect one another in a ricocheting rhythm of interrupted echoes. Such disruptions to narrative, physical and psychological unity suggest that collaboration between viewer and art work, artist and architect, and artistic production and bureaucratic agenda could not quite achieve a totalizing synthesis and might potentially evade exploitation by any one force. With National Socialism discrediting a totalized mobilization of the public, it seems that this potentially frustrating and inconclusive experience of Art was the only way to activate a European consciousness that would “surpass the realm of aesthetics and return to life itself”.

Life in the Bauhütte

The fiction of a united Europe as a new political entity went hand in hand with the development of new model of community, a form of “European Citizenship” before the coining of such a term. At Gelsenkirchen, this concept took the form of a spontaneous living arrangement in an old firehouse (Alte Feuerwache) close to the building site. The “Bauhütte”, as it was christened by Helmuth de Haas, editor for the Essen newspaper *Die Welt*,³⁵ served as central organ for the theater’s planning and administrative offices as well as the living and sleeping quarters for the international group of bureaucrats, engineers, architects, artists, and construction workers. This temporary social organization, also retrospectively characterized by Ruhnau as a “melting pot”,³⁶ became the material embodiment of both a high modernist representation of Europe and its antithesis. According to Ruhnau, the aim was to “engage visual artists as ‘aesthetic experts’ on an equal footing with technical experts in areas such as structural analysis, heating, or ventilation. In our ‘Bauhütte’ [...] we achieved the ideal of engineers and artists designing a building together. It was no longer just a question of the individual artistic disciplines – we were building together”.³⁷ Ruhnau’s statement echoes with the Bauhaus’ harnessing of modernity’s specialization and rationalization into a socially progressive program as well as Jean Monnet’s visualization of Europe as a socio-political, economic and cultural body based on a powerful faith in scientific and technical progress, elevation of the architect and engineer to

³⁵ Helmuth de Haas, “Der Bau ist Bühne: Das neue Theater in Gelsenkirchen”, in: *Die Welt*, April 3, 1959.

³⁶ Werner Ruhnau: *Der Raum, Das Spiel und Die Künste*, 152.

³⁷ Werner Ruhnau: *Der Raum, Das Spiel und Die Künste*, 149.

governmental authorities, and bureaucratic, technocratic form of governance.³⁸ However, the adoption of the term "Bauhütte" also made a striking allusion to the concept from the Middle Ages, a reference to the totality of skill (and laborers) involved in a large-scale medieval building projects, typically the construction of a cathedral, and includes the architect, carpenters, stone masons, master carvers, painters, etc., who often worked and traveled as a team across Europe.³⁹ Its adoption at Gelsenkirchen evokes a pre-modern form of organic society, with its guild like formation of artisans and craftsmen, a non-hierarchical power structure, and a lost model of a unified set of skills that stand in stark opposition to both the Bauhaus' and Jean Monnet's affirmations of modernity as the keystone of aesthetic and political collectivity. On this basis, one might surmise that the firehouse symbolized a withdrawal from the contingencies of the historical realities into an enclosed and ethically sufficient environment.

Despite these retrospectively radical tendencies, however, the Bauhütte was not untainted by the *Realpolitik* of collective European identity formation necessitated by the rising Super Powers of the US and the Soviet Union and the onslaught of the Cold War. In fact, my contention is that this Bauhütte-without-borders enacted a mini-European community and a mode of citizenship that, while primarily dealing with aesthetic issues, also resonated with the fiction of Europe as an independent bloc in the world. While it is impossible to delve into the deep recesses of the evolving debates, it would be safe to say that what was partly at stake in the strengthening of the Franco-German axis was the myth of Europe's identity as tangibly different and autonomous from both power blocs, a socio-political and cultural entity situated between the totalitarian system of the communist Eastern bloc and the democratic but imperial system of the capitalist West.

It is significant to note, therefore, that in spite of Ruhnau's assertion that "as artists, we regarded ourselves as existing without boundaries and we made our own rules",⁴⁰ the "Blue Patriots Party", as they called themselves, structured their social organization in the Bauhütte according to historically contingent power hierarchies and national affiliations. As might be expected, the primary power-duo of the Blue Patriots Party were Klein and Ruhnau, and, as the latter recalls, "Yves and I were to be the

³⁸ William Walters and Jens Henrick Haahr, *Governing Europe: Discourse, Governability and European Integration*, London 2005, 21-42.

³⁹ Werner Jüttner, *Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Bauhütte und des Bauwesens im Mittelalter*, Köln 1935.

⁴⁰ *Werner Ruhnau: Der Raum, Das Spiel und Die Künste*, 152; subsequent quote on same page.

'chiefs' for France and Germany and Anita Ruhнау, Bernadette Alain, Franz Krause, Paul Dierkes and Charles Wilp, among others, were to be members". If they were equal 'chiefs' in the Bauhütte's sanctum, Klein's inability to understand or speak German became a source of altercations and misunderstandings with the external governing apparatus.⁴¹ As letters reveal, Klein felt guilty for his angry outbursts and for overstepping his bounds within an organizational power structure obviously directed by the German architect.⁴² This sense of inferiority transformed into authority when Klein described the situation at Gelsenkirchen to a French audience at the Sorbonne in June 1958.⁴³ Clearly, there was a discrepancy between Klein and Ruhнау's intimate sentiments and public declarations regarding their roles and identity within the Bauhütte, especially when they crossed the Franco-German border and alternated between 'native' and 'foreigner'. As citizen-subjects of their respective nation-states, the border was not simply a physical boundary that externally shaped their identity but became an internal condition of their own national identification.⁴⁴ If, on the one hand, the 'internationalism' in the Bauhütte aimed to eliminate cultural and disciplinary borders and create an inclusive aesthetic-political "European Situation", on the other hand, it very much depended on maintaining a differentiated identity.

Perhaps aware of the propensity for cultural misunderstandings and antagonism, several of the Bauhütte's residents formalized a contract in German (January 25, 1959) with a strict set of rules and regulations. The contract covered the individual and collective responsibility regarding everything from laundry, groceries, cleaning, repair, fuel, heat and postage costs, to sleeping arrangements, daily schedule, expectations for cleanliness and order, and penalties for breaking the contract rules.⁴⁵ While, on

⁴¹ Sidra Stich provides a brief account of Klein's reception in Germany in *Yves Klein*, 113.

⁴² Letter from Yves Klein to Werner Ruhнау, January 17, 1958 in which Klein writes, "I'm sorry for everything that happened between us. Understand me: I don't understand a single thing of the German conversations that occur around me at Gelsenkirchen [...]. Clearly, it's your theater and you're the architect and I obey no one but you". See *Wie das Gelsenkirchener Blau auf Yves Klein Kam*, 57-8. Klein recommends Jean Tinguely as his German interpreter in November 1958.

⁴³ The lectures at the Sorbonne occurred on June 3 and 5, 1959 under the auspices of the German ambassador to France and German cultural attaché in Paris, who publicly supported the Franco-German partnership with engraved invitations and a reception.

⁴⁴ Étienne Balibar, "What is a Border? and The Borders of Europe", in: *Politics and the Other Scene*, London 2002.

⁴⁵ The contract, signed by Paul Dierkes, Anita and Werner Ruhнау, Rotraut Uecker, Yves Klein and Robert Adams, is reproduced in Werner Ruhнау, *Baukunst: Das Gelsenkirchener Theater*, Düsseldorf 1992, 42.

one register, the contract may be regarded as a tongue-in-cheek aesthetic artifact, the fact that an administrative document was used as a solution to avert social conflicts in the Bauhütte is revealing. Apparently, even an aesthetic experiment that attempted to craft an alternative mode of social existence, a "European Situation" different from the democratic and totalitarian models of West and East, was enmeshed in the bureaucratic apparatus at the heart of modernist nation state formation. The only aesthetic solution for Europe to materialize as a "third force" was to function as a paradoxical overlay and mixture of historical and ideological models of identity, citizenship and nationhood.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, the self-conscious collaboration between avant-garde artists and architects within the unique framework of the "European" and "International" situation makes the Gelsenkirchen Musiktheater a primary case study for the post-war intersection and reformulation of aesthetics and politics. Most visibly, while it highlights the emergence of proto-forms of public art, site specificity, and collaborative aesthetics as central paradigms for the formation of post-war citizenship, it also already dramatically complicates their operation as inextricably linked to a lived body experience, the strained power-relations between multiple authors, and a set of discourses produced and assimilated by the contingent context. As we have seen at Gelsenkirchen, if the aesthetic fictions of Europe emerged from and continuously negotiated the friction between these various constellations, the danger that avant-garde practice would be transformed into a cultural instrument for the state-sanctioned, bureaucratic production and dissemination of a European public body was always present.

I argue, however, that while Klein and Ruhnau reconstituted the avant-garde and Europe through official government channels, they also changed the very terms of civil service by inscribing various slippages and disruptions into its potentially stultifying, univocal, technocratic parameters. Indeed, the fictions of Europe that materialized at Gelsenkirchen suggested that a European consciousness would only emerge by working through the specter of the war, a process that would have to be institutionalized within cultural memory, and by acknowledging that the continent's identity as a 'third force' meant inhabiting an overlay of historical, economic, and ideological models of collectivity through the mediation of administrative processes. On the first count, Klein's "aesthetics of collaboration" proposed that a model of Europe with a

Franco-German rapport as its central axis could only gain shape by transforming the painful issues of guilt and responsibility into a shared, inter-subjective burden. On the second count, Ruhnau's "Bauhütte" iterated a radically alternative living and working environment in which divergent socio-economic 'archives' would immanently constitute the foundation of Europe. Thus, while individual, national, and historical conflicts productively cohabitated within the state-sponsored cultural practice at Gelsenkirchen, Klein and Ruhnau complicated the possibility of holding on to any a priori notion of the central terms of this discussion, transforming Europe, avant-garde, and modernism into signifiers that could construct, contain, and critique the paradoxes of the post-war historical condition.

The nature of European citizenship and the role and identity of the European Community have continued to be significant questions since Klein and Ruhnau's collaboration at Gelsenkirchen.⁴⁶ Who are the citizens or this new polity? Is there a distinct *demos* or public that can be conceived as existing beyond the nation state as a uniquely European construct? Should Europe itself function like a modern nation-state or should current nation states be transformed to act as models of pluralistic relations? The problem of belonging to a supra-national polity clearly has wider implications about the mechanisms of representation, governance, and participation. The attempt to define the European *demos* brings with it questions about the rights and obligations of citizenship as a 'community' which includes and protects those who belong to the same system of rules. It also raises the question about the possibility of making Europe a truly democratic society, as such a system ultimately depends on being able to define 'the people' who comprise it. Recent studies on the problem of citizenship have stressed the significance of culture – rather than nation – as a binding thread that might lay the groundwork for a pan-European identity.⁴⁷ "Cultural Citizenship" is a new practice of citizenship that mirrors the European model of a trans-national plurality. Rather than a common culture, however, these initiatives propose multiculturalism and agonism as the basis for democratic citizenship.⁴⁸ In this reformulation, the impossibility of a universal consensus in the European public sphere is

⁴⁶ Fiorella Dell'Olio, *The Europeanization of Citizenship: Between the Ideology of Nationality, Immigration, and European Identity*, Burlington 2005.

⁴⁷ Juan M. Delgado-Moreira, *Multicultural Citizenship of the European Union*, Burlington 2000.

⁴⁸ Étienne Balibar, *We, The People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, tr. James Swenson, Princeton 2004; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York 1994; Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London 2000; and *idem*, *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, and Community*, London 1996.

transformed into an operative element. Without imposing a teleological interpretation on the many fictions of Europe, Gelsenkirchen appears as a precocious attempt to "work through" French and German national differences via artistic collaboration based on dissensus. In this regard, it remains to be asked how visual culture can continue to be deployed in the project of constructing an agonistic European citizenship without succumbing to the homogenizing dynamic of globalizing capitalism.

Tendencies and Identities

Discours internationaliste et conscience identitaire des échanges culturels : l'exemple belgo-allemand (*Der Sturm*, *Résurrection*)

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Introduction

L'hypothèse d'intérêt général que nous voudrions soumettre à l'épreuve du cas particulier du dialogue belgo-allemand dans les avant-gardes est la suivante : Le discours internationaliste constitutif des avant-gardes européennes n'est pas nécessairement incompatible avec une conscience nationale ou identitaire des rapports culturels. Ce constat a été formulé sous forme d'hypothèse, dans le prolongement de recherches consacrées depuis la fin des années à l'historiographie des avant-gardes internationales autour de la guerre de 1914-1918. On sait qu'en particulier l'expressionnisme allemand, au début de celle-ci, constitua temporairement une alliance de fait avec le nationalisme de Guillaume II. Il intégra à ce moment pleinement un impératif guerrier dans le pathos du renouveau civilisationnel programmatique des avant-gardes, sous la forme d'un discours « vitaliste », porteur de régénération¹.

Il s'agit ici d'un élément qu'un bilan d'ensemble de l'historiographie de l'expressionnisme allemand encore à écrire se devrait d'intégrer. Il pourrait le faire dans la perspective d'une comparaison avec les mouvements homonymes et autres courants d'avant-garde en Europe, à la suite des

¹ Hubert Roland explicite cette hypothèse de départ dans son article « Les avant-gardes internationalistes, la guerre et l'occupation : une mise au point », dans S. Jaumain, M. Amara, B. Majerus & A. Vrints (éd.), *Une guerre totale ? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre mondiale*, Bruxelles 2005, 301-13. Il articule notamment cette analyse autour de la critique de l'expressionnisme allemand faite a posteriori par Georg Lukács, qui stigmatisa le « manque de défense idéologique » des expressionnistes. À propos de l'alliance entre buts de guerre et expressionnisme, cf. notamment Klaus H. Kiefer, « Kriegsziele und literarische Utopie im Ersten Weltkrieg », in: *Krieg und Literatur/ War and Literature*, 9, 1993, 19-40.

recherches les plus récentes². La question qui nous occupe ici ne concerne pas directement la guerre mais se situe à la fois en amont et au-delà de l'internationalisme consensuel de principe des avant-gardes. Il s'agit de se pencher sur les modalités selon lesquelles un grand courant d'avant-garde comme l'expressionnisme envisagea dès le départ la constitution de sa propre identité. Celle-ci se fonda nécessairement sur une délimitation de son rapport à l'autre, qu'il soit celui de la sphère culturelle voisine et/ou celui d'un canon esthétique différent. En effet, suivant une homologie de principe, les questions identitaires et nationales nous semblent indissociables des débats esthétiques sur la modernité, lorsque celle-ci se présente comme une rupture inéluctable avec la tradition.

La rencontre entre les avant-gardes allemandes et belges autour de la Première Guerre mondiale brasse l'ensemble de ces questions et s'accomplit selon des modalités particulières. On sera particulièrement attentif aux « malentendus productifs » qu'elles ont pu générer, et aux formes plus ou moins nettes d'appropriation de l'autre dans un mouvement de légitimation des identités en question.

La position du *Sturm* : l'internationalisme des grandes nations

De tous les cercles et réseaux de l'expressionnisme allemand, c'est sans doute celui de la revue et de la galerie *Der Sturm* de Herwarth Walden qui incarne le mieux l'internationalisation totale de l'art d'avant-garde. En particulier, dès 1912, Walden orchestre l'importation du futurisme pour donner une nouvelle et décisive impulsion à l'évolution des idées esthétiques³. Celles-ci trouvent à s'exposer partout en Europe, et c'est dans ce contexte que se tiendra l'exposition Kandinsky à la galerie Giroux à Bruxelles, dont il sera question plus loin.

Personne ne savait encore, à l'époque, à quel point la guerre à venir allait faire resurgir tous les nationalismes, jusque et y compris au sein des milieux artistiques. La recherche sur l'expressionnisme a mis longtemps à admettre ce constat, puisqu'il fallut attendre les années 1990 pour que l'historienne d'art Kate Winskell documente la participation de Walden et de son épouse Nell à la propagande allemande, informée par eux de ce qui

² Cf. l'ouvrage collectif *Expressionnisme(s) et avant-gardes*, études réunies et présentées par Isabelle Krzykowski & Cécile Millot, Paris 2007.

³ Cf. Barbara Meazzi, « Les Souterrains du futurisme et de l'expressionnisme » et Maurice Godé, « Un malentendu fécond : la réception du futurisme en Allemagne », in : *Expressionnisme(s) et avant-gardes*, 69-86 et 227-50.

se déroulait en terres scandinave et hollandaise neutres⁴. Certes, la motivation sous-jacente relevait essentiellement de l'opportunisme et du souci de continuer à financer une onéreuse galerie d'art. En ceci l'entre-prise est comparable à la revue *Résurrection* du dadaïste belge Clément Pansaers, financée par l'occupant allemand, un cas également abordé dans la dernière partie de cet article. Il n'empêche toutefois que cette péripétie entraîne un nouveau regard, qui éclaire le fait que l'internationalisme de Walden ne s'avère pas incompatible avec une adhésion à la nation allemande.

Ceci donne à penser qu'au moment de la naissance des avant-gardes, les courants littéraires et artistiques ne s'étaient peut-être pas complètement émancipés du mouvement des nationalismes du XIX^e siècle. Si le discours de l'artiste ne se positionnait plus comme jadis au service de la construction de la nation, les catégories des mouvements d'avant-garde restent attachées à des identités nationales pleines. Celles-ci firent en outre la part belle aux trois grandes nations qui portèrent l'innovation et donnèrent le ton dans l'émergence de l'avant-garde: l'Allemagne, l'Italie et la France. Tel fut en tout cas le point de vue implicite de Herwarth Walden dans sa mise au point théorique de 1917, *Einblick in Kunst: Expressionismus, Futurismus, Kubismus*⁵.

Le nationalisme d'une petite nation et la lente mise à mal du « mythe nordique »

Mais qu'en était-il de l'identité des petites nations ? En Belgique littéraire, le discours de « culture nationale », forgé après l'indépendance de 1830, était fondé sur le « mythe nordique ». Il s'agissait d'un discours de différenciation de la culture belge par rapport à la France, grâce à l'apport et à l'assimilation originale d'« influences nordiques », d'inspiration flamande et germanique⁶. Toutefois, si la culture flamande se voyait valorisée sur le plan symbolique, le français demeurait la langue dominante des structures politiques et sociales. Ce manque de reconnaissance devait générer à terme des forces centrifuges, qui allaient émerger après la Première Guerre mondiale.

⁴ Kate Winskell, « The Art of Propaganda : Herwarth Walden and 'Der Sturm' », in: *Art History*, 3, September 1995, 315-44.

⁵ Cf. Herwarth Walden, *Einblick in Kunst. Expressionismus, Futurismus, Kubismus*, Verlag Der Sturm, Berlin. Nachdruck der Ausgabe Berlin 1917, Kraus Reprint, 1973.

⁶ Cf. Benoît Denis & Jean-Marie Klinkenberg, *La littérature belge. Précis d'histoire sociale*, Bruxelles 2005, 104-9.

La génération symboliste des Maurice Maeterlinck, Georges Rodenbach et Émile Verhaeren, dont le rayonnement international était fort, avait épousé ce discours centripète, qui instrumentalisait en quelque sorte les influences germaniques et « nordiques » au service de la langue française. Nous verrons que la nouvelle génération des avant-gardes, au moment où elle rejettera la tradition, cherchera également à mettre à mal ce modèle. Selon des modalités très particulières, elle établira une nouvelle homologie structurante entre la rupture du discours esthétique dominant et le modèle de « la vieille Belgique ».

L'exemple de la réception du futurisme italien en Belgique annonce une phase d'incertitude et de transition. Même les artistes les plus en vue (souvent des cosmopolites francophones) qui entendaient prendre au sérieux le manifeste de Marinetti, se sentaient tellement à l'aise dans le modèle de la « Belle Époque » qu'ils condamnaient unanimement l'appel du futuriste italien à se libérer de la « lourde » tradition et à brûler les musées. La réaction d'André De Ridder, cosmopolite flamand (chose plutôt rare) et responsable de *De Boomgaard*, est exemplaire de cette situation. Dans sa revue, le rédacteur militait en faveur d'une « modernisation » de la culture flamande, mais dans sa lettre à Marinetti, il s'opposait à l'idée de faire table rase des musées des « Beaux-Arts » et de la tradition⁷.

Car il y avait encore quelque chose de spécifiquement identitaire dans cette défense d'une culture « moderne », attachée à la « tradition ». Cette forme de mélange idiosyncratique rappelait en réalité le point de vue de la génération des symbolistes belges tels Maeterlinck et Verhaeren, les deux grands avocats de la littérature belge à l'étranger⁸. Eux aussi avaient déjà joué la carte de leur « nordicité » (symbolisée par la Flandre rurale) comme un remède « spirituel » contre le « matérialisme » du monde moderne (symbolisé à son tour par la Wallonie industrielle)⁹.

⁷ De Ridder écrivait dans sa lettre (en néerlandais) : « Ne faites pas exploser les bibliothèques et les musées avec de la dynamite ». Cf. W. Vanderstede, *Van 'psycho-realisme' naar 'expressionisme'. De esthetische opvattingen van André de Ridder in het licht van de Eerste Wereldoorlog (ca. 1909 – ca. 1912)*, thèse inédite K.U. Leuven (Louvain 1998); cité d'après An Paenhuysen, *De nieuwe wereld. Avant-garde en cultuurkritiek in België tijdens het interbellum*. Thèse de doctorat inédite K.U. Leuven (Louvain 2005), 63-4.

⁸ Pour une analyse de la relation entre Verhaeren et le futurisme italien : David Gullentops, « Verhaeren et Marinetti », in : J. Herman, S. Engels & A. Demeulenaere (éds.), *Littératures en contact. Mélanges offerts à Vic Nachtergaele*, Louvain 2003, 133-45.

⁹ Denis et Klinkenberg citent « l'exotisme nordique » comme facteur important et explicatif pour le succès du symbolisme belge : « Les symbolistes belges vont parvenir à une synthèse parfaite de l'exotisme nordique : leur littérature est tout entière empreinte de nordicité, mais celle-ci est « désincarnée » (on ne trouve pas dans leurs textes d'aspects descriptifs ou réalistes, qui feraient basculer cette littérature dans le régionalisme). Ce caractère « exo-

De cette façon, la Belgique s'affichait à l'étranger comme une nation moderne, mais sans que cette modernité soit ressentie comme « inhumaine ». Au cours des années précédant la Première Guerre mondiale, cette stratégie s'avéra une formule efficace pour attirer l'attention au niveau international sur ce petit pays au carrefour des grandes nations européennes. À l'aube de la guerre, la Belgique eut ainsi l'honneur d'organiser deux expositions universelles. À Bruxelles (en 1910) tout comme à Gand (en 1913), l'Allemagne profita pour sa part de cette occasion pour se profiler comme une nation « hyper-moderne » et même « technocrate ».

La Belgique, par contre, tenait à nouveau à souligner ses liens avec le passé, et en particulier avec la « tradition flamande ». En 1910, une *Exposition d'art ancien. L'art belge au XVII^e siècle* s'était attelée à illustrer que Rubens et ses contemporains formaient la base historique d'une « culture belge »¹⁰. Dans ce cadre tout sauf « ultra-moderne », l'État belge avait aussi organisé une exposition de folklore¹¹. Là, des gravures d'après Bruegel l'Ancien étaient censées amuser les visiteurs avec « les proverbes flamands », « tradition » également reprise à son compte par la génération des symbolistes francophones. Comme le suggère la combinaison d'un beffroi avec des cheminées d'industrie dans une affiche de Spilliaert, la Belgique n'avait pas encore changé sa stratégie de présentation pour l'exposition universelle à Gand en 1913.

Mais un intellectuel comme Karel Van de Woestijne commençait à avoir des doutes. Dans un article destiné au *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, le poète flamand se moquait de « la manière dont le petit citoyen bourgeois flamand visite une exposition universelle » (de wijze, waarop de kleine Vlaamsche burgerman eene wereldtentoonstelling bezoekt)¹². Il stigmatisait surtout l'étroitesse d'esprit de celui qui fermait les yeux sur tous les pavillons des « autres » nations, pour finalement se contenter d'un apéritif dans le pavillon *Oud Vlaanderen* (« Vieille Flandre ») :

- « Ça c'est l'Angleterre, et ça c'est la France, et ça c'est Paris », déclara Pier.
- « Mais il n'y a rien à y voir. Les gens ne vont pas ailleurs que là où nous sommes déjà allés. Il n'y a rien d'autre à voir que *Oud Vlaanderen* ».
- « Et ça là ? », demanda Cadie, « c'est sûrement la prison ? »

tique » sera parfaitement perçu en France, en même temps qu'il sera reçu en Belgique comme l'expression d'une singularité identitaire » (*La littérature belge*, 134).

¹⁰ *Exposition internationale de Bruxelles 1910. Exposition d'art ancien : l'art belge au XVII^e siècle, de juin à novembre 1910*, Bruxelles 1910.

¹¹ Isidoor Teirlinck, *Catalogue de l'exposition du folklore*, Bruxelles 1910, 40-53.

¹² Karel Van de Woestijne, *Verzameld journalistiek werk*, Vol. VI, Gent 1990, 411.

- « Mais pas du tout, stupide, ça c'est l'Allemagne ! », se moqua son mari.¹³

Pier et Cadie personnifient donc la petite-bourgeoisie flamande, qui se contente des stéréotypes (belges) de la culture flamande. Sans intérêt pour ce qui se passe à l'étranger, elle n'envisage la modernité de l'Allemagne que comme une « prison ». Un raisonnement comparable sous-tend encore avant la guerre la vision de la peinture belge, un « art national », qui refuse d'être « ultra-moderne » et au contraire unit sa qualité artistique au référent de la tradition. Cette « conscience historique » était donc pour la plupart des critiques d'art belges un argument pour s'identifier avec l'art français et, en même temps, dénigrer l'art allemand comme le produit superficiel d'une nation hyper-moderne, dont l'esprit n'est pas formé par la tradition. À l'occasion du salon d'automne d'« Art Contemporain » à Anvers en 1913, Ary Delen, critique d'art flamand, écrivait ainsi dans la revue *Onze Kunst* :

Certains des nombreux peintres d'Outre-Rhin présentés ici font montre de compétences techniques qu'on ne peut sous-estimer : par exemple d'abord Leo Putz avec *Été* et *Sur la Plage*, Fritz Erler avec quelques nus qui ne sont pas désagréables, puis Wilhelm Gailhof, Josse Goossens et Walter Püttner. Toutefois, tous montrent ce qui fait défaut aux peintres allemands modernes : le manque de sentiment pour la couleur. La moindre distinction leur fait défaut, il manque à tous, sans exception, le sens de l'harmonie des coloris, inné chez les Français et les Belges. Beaucoup d'entre eux ont une réputation faite dans leur pays, mais une comparaison de leurs œuvres avec celles de ces peintres, qui, chez nous, ne parviennent même pas au panthéon dans leur pays, fera voir qu'un sentiment de fierté de nos propres grandeurs n'est rien moins que parfaitement légitime.¹⁴

¹³ « “Dát is Engeland, en dát is Frankrijk, en dát is Parijs”, verklaarde Pier. “Maar daar is niets te zien. De menschen gaan anders niet dan waar wij al geweest zijn. Er is anders niet meer te zien dan Oud-Vlaanderen”. - “En dat hier?” vroeg Cadie; “dat is zeker 't prison?” - “Wel neene, gij sloore, dat is Duitschland!”, lachte haar man ». Van de Woestijne, *Verzameld Werk*, 409.

¹⁴ « Mochten eenigen van de vele hier vertegenwoordigde schilders van over den Rijn, dan al blijk geven van niet te onderschatten technische vaardigheid, als b.v. vooreerst Leo Putz met zijn *Zomer* en *Aan het Strand*, Fritz Erler met een paar niet onaardige naaktfiguren, verder Wilhelm Gailhof, Josse Goossens en Walter Püttner, toch vertoonen allen dit aan de moderne Duitschers zeer eigen gebrek: gemis aan kleurgevoel. Zij missen alle distinctie, aan allen zonder uitzondering ontbreekt die aan Franschen en Belgen zo ingeboren zin voor harmonisch koloriet. Velen van hen zijn in hun land gevestigde reputaties, maar een vergelijking van hun werk met dat van onze schilders, die het heel dikwijls zelfs niet zoover mochten brengen van een sant te zijn in eigen land, zal doen inzien dat een gevoel van fierheid voor onze eigen grootheden niets minder is dan volkomen gewettigd ». Ary Delen, *Onze Kunst*, Année XII, 163.

Cette « profondeur » essentielle de l'art belge, la littérature belge la revendique aussi et elle se profile comme le produit d'une petite nation européenne, où la superficialité du monde moderne est compensée par une spiritualité « naturelle », nourrie par une « tradition flamande ».

La poursuite du « nouveau » :
Une élite belgo-parisienne contre « les crieurs de meeting »

Avec l'ascension d'une avant-garde internationaliste pendant les années 1909-1912, le sens d'une incertitude identitaire allait peu à peu s'installer chez une élite belge qui, jusque-là, s'accommodait parfaitement du mythe nordique. Un premier doute de ce genre se manifeste dans la lettre que Jules Schmalzigaug (1882-1927), peintre anversois d'origine allemande et fils d'un grand industriel dans le port d'Anvers, écrivit le 17 mars 1911 à ses parents¹⁵. Durant son séjour à Paris, ce cosmopolite francophone (qui devint un véritable futuriste en 1913) avait fait la connaissance d'une élite « belge » qui montrait davantage d'affection pour le raffinement de la culture française que pour la culture en Belgique. Rassuré par le modèle des « grands Belges » Verhaeren et Maeterlinck, Schmalzigaug était d'opinion que la Belgique souffrait de la « petitesse » de ces Flamands qui s'engageaient pour, entre autres, la reconnaissance officielle de leur langue maternelle. Ces Flamands « engagés » restaient selon lui aveugles aux nouvelles tendances internationales et au développement rapide de la culture à l'étranger. Par conséquent, les esprits « chercheurs », selon Schmalzigaug, quittaient de plus en plus la patrie, pour chercher une ambiance plus stimulante à l'étranger :

Il est intéressant de noter l'opinion autorisée de Verhaeren, lui, le représentant le mieux marqué de l'esprit flamand et la plus réelle gloire de notre littérature actuelle. Il était d'accord avec moi pour déclarer que ce mouvement n'a rien de grand ni de généreux ; ce n'est nullement le cri de délivrance qui pousserait une race opprimée, mais une simple coalition d'intérêts petits, des revendications au moindre effort de gens sans savoir vivre, à culture insuffisante, se complaisant dans une éducation embryonnaire et qui veulent nous imposer, pour leur propre commodité, la généralisation de l'état somnolent où sont arrêtées leurs mentalités. Ils créeront l'exode des esprits qui cherchent plus de raffinement et qui veulent vivre dans l'ambiance d'une culture bien formée et mûrie. « Pour ma part, ajoutait

¹⁵ À propos de Jules Schmalzigaug, cf. Paenhuysen, *De nieuwe wereld*, 33-71.

Verhaeren, j'ai horreur de rentrer en Belgique » (il habite Paris), - voulant bien préciser à quel point ces menées l'agacent et l'énervent.¹⁶

Schmalzigaug ajoutait que « Maeterlinck pense de même », concernant « ces insupportables cabaretiers, crieurs de meeting ». Ces extraits illustrent non seulement qu'il y avait pas mal de tensions entre le niveau flamand et le niveau belge à l'aube de la guerre, mais aussi que les icônes de la culture belge s'inquiétaient du fait que les arts changeaient plus rapidement à l'étranger qu'en Belgique. Peut-être à cause de ces questions identitaires qui pesaient sur le climat des arts en Belgique, ce « petit pays » risquait de rater la résurrection internationale des nouvelles tendances.

Et en effet, Schmalzigaug avait raison. En Belgique, des préoccupations identitaires se manifestèrent quand, pour la première fois, le public belge put faire connaissance avec l'internationalisme de l'avant-garde.

La crise d'identité d'une petite nation : Kandinsky à Bruxelles, une halte européenne du *Sturm*

Un an après que l'exposition de Herwarth Walden consacrée aux futuristes italiens ait fait le tour d'Europe et se soit arrêtée à Bruxelles¹⁷, le promoteur allemand d'une avant-garde internationale avait prévu un autre arrêt dans la capitale belge pour la tournée de sa nouvelle exposition, celle de Wassily Kandinsky. En Octobre 1912, Kandinsky avait exposé son œuvre à la galerie Der Sturm à Berlin, puis il était prévu que l'exposition soit montrée, écrivait l'artiste, à « Rotterdam, Leyden, Utrecht, Hamburg, Groningen, Amsterdam, Brüssel, Antwerpen (?), Karlsruhe (?), Frankfurt a.M., Aachen und im Anschluss an München nach Stuttgart und später (1916) nach Stockholm »¹⁸. Le 26 mai 1913, Walden informait l'artiste de *Der Blaue Reiter* que ses tableaux se trouvaient pour le moment à Bruxelles. Pour des raisons inconnues, l'exposition ne s'arrêta finalement pas à Anvers¹⁹. Les Belges qui voulaient faire connaissance avec le représentant

¹⁶ Lettre de 17 Mars 1911 de Jules Schmalzigaug à ses parents. Archives de l'Art Contemporain/ Archief voor hedendaagse kunst (Bruxelles), lettre 50:176.

¹⁷ Les futuristes italiens exposèrent à Bruxelles dans la *Galerie Georges Giroux* du 24 mai 1912 au 8 juin 1912.

¹⁸ Wassily Kandinsky, *Die gesammelten Schriften*, Bd. I, herausgegeben von Hans K. Roethel & Jelena Hahl-Koch, Bern 1980, 137-8.

¹⁹ La ville d'Anvers ne figurait même plus dans la lettre de Kandinsky du 11 juin 1913.

de la peinture moderne en Russie n'avaient donc d'autre choix que de se diriger vers la Galerie Georges Giroux à Bruxelles²⁰.

La réaction de l'écrivain Franz Hellens, critique d'art pour l'importante revue *L'Art moderne*, fut caractéristique de l'état du champ en Belgique. Hellens tint à différencier les tableaux abstraits et les paysages du peintre russe. Il définit les « improvisations » abstraites comme « une cacophonie, où se produirait de-ci de-là un mélange de sons assez curieux, [qui] serait de la musique. Les initiés y comprennent peut-être quelque chose, – mais c'est si ennuyeux et problématique, de l'art pour initiés! »²¹. Hellens préférait donc les paysages du « jeune » Kandinsky :

Ce n'est pas dans ses extravagantes improvisations que M. Kandinsky me paraît manifester le mieux les ressources de son talent. Cette exposition offre mieux que cela. Et, notamment, quelques paysages hardiment composés et peints avec une sorte d'ivresse musicale sont là pour attester que le peintre des Improvisations sait, lorsqu'il consent à demeurer sur terre, donner des impressions d'art fort intenses, où la fantaisie dans la forme et le coloris ne cesse pas d'être humains.²²

Que Hellens établisse une différence entre les « inhumaines » improvisations et les paysages « humains », reflète encore une tradition « belge », celle qui consiste à idéaliser « le paysage flamand » dans les arts. Hellens avait reconnu dans la langue « universelle » des tableaux abstraits de Kandinsky un danger, non seulement pour cette tradition « humaine » des paysagistes, mais également pour l'efficacité du « mythe nordique ».

Par ailleurs, les artistes et écrivains néerlandophones se servaient aussi de cette idéalisation du paysage flamand, mais pour des raisons plutôt d'ordre socio-politique. De leur point de vue, la représentation d'une vie bucolique dans « l'Arcadie flamande » symbolisait une façon de vivre « typiquement flamande » et complètement différente de la vie bourgeoise dans les « villes belges ». Une caricature de Stan Van Offel, artiste flamand et frère de Edmond Van Offel, dans *La Belgique artistique et littéraire*, illustre bien la rencontre entre une tradition régionale/identitaire et l'internationalisme de l'avant-garde, selon Herwarth Walden.

²⁰ Le galeriste Georges Giroux était Français d'origine, mais déménageait pour Bruxelles en 1908. Il y ouvrit sa galerie à l'automne 1911.

²¹ Franz Hellens, in: *L'Art moderne*, 23, juin 1913, 181.

²² Hellens, in : *L'Art moderne*, 181.



Fig. 20: Constant Van Offel, caricature de l'exposition de Kandinsky à Bruxelles, Galerie Georges Giroux, 1913.

La suggestion selon laquelle les compositions abstraites de Kandinsky étaient, si on les interprétait correctement, des paysages, indique que le public de Van Offel était habitué à un art de paysagistes.

Ce fut grâce au *Sturm* et à Herwarth Walden que Georges Giroux et quelques critiques d'art bruxellois (essentiellement Ray Nyst et Franz Hellens) commencèrent à prendre conscience que le temps du « mythe nordique » était passé, et que la Belgique avait à présent besoin d'un autre modèle pour se profiler dans le monde cosmopolite des avant-gardes internationalistes. Cet urgent besoin d'un art belge plus cosmopolite et sans

« obstacles identitaires » fut à la base du succès de Rik Wouters et de ses amis « fauves » à l'aube de la guerre. Hélas, même le « modernisme » de Wouters fut l'objet de discussions entre critiques d'art flamands et belges. Ray Nyst, critique pour *La Belgique artistique et littéraire*, s'étonna que la version néerlandaise figurait avant la version française dans le catalogue de l'exposition de Wouters chez Giroux (20 février – 4 mars 1914)²³. Ce fut ensuite Maurits Van de Moortel, un jeune poète flamand, qui suggéra, au printemps 1914, dans *De Goedendag*, la revue des jeunes flamingants anversois, que Wouters n'était pas un artiste « belge », mais bien le « vrai Flamand ». Il servira, pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, d'artiste-modèle pour Paul van Ostaïen et la jeune génération « activiste », qui s'intéressa de près à l'avant-garde.

L'impact de la guerre : Rupture et reprise conditionnelle du dialogue belgo-allemand

La présence du *Sturm* et de Kandinsky à la galerie Giroux en 1913 en est un signe parmi d'autres. Tout est en place à l'aube de la guerre pour une réception optimale de l'expressionnisme allemand en Belgique. Les années d'avant-guerre voient l'apogée d'un dialogue belgo-allemand fortement consolidé dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle²⁴. La Belgique avait apporté une contribution originale au prestige de la culture allemande en Europe, notamment via une intense réception de Wagner. Quant à Verhaeren et Maeterlinck, leur fortune est particulièrement forte dans les pays de langue allemande, où on les envisage également comme les précurseurs d'une nouvelle esthétique. En outre, l'Université de Bruxelles bénéficie de la présence d'un médiateur idéal : le poète expressionniste Ernst Stadler y enseigne dès 1910 la littérature allemande. Il représente par excellence le passeur d'idées entre la Belgique, la France et l'Allemagne, à la charnière du symbolisme et de l'expressionnisme naissant²⁵.

²³ Ray Nyst dans *La Belgique artistique et littéraire*. Revue mensuelle nationale du mouvement intellectuel, 1, 1^{er} avril 1914, 91.

²⁴ Cf. Ernst Leonardy & Hubert Roland (éds.), *Deutsch-belgische Beziehungen im kulturellen und literarischen Bereich / Les relations culturelles et littéraires belgo-allemandes 1890-1940*, Frankfurt am Main u.a. 1999.

²⁵ Les écrivains flamands Raymond Brulez et Julien Kuypers ont rapporté avec émotion les séances de séminaire que Stadler organisait à son domicile de la chaussée de Waterloo. Il y était question des Romantiques allemands, mais aussi de Jules Laforgue, Francis Jammes ou Stefan George (cf. Nina Schneider, *Ernst Stadler und seine Freundeskreise. Geistiges Europäertum zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg 1993, 133-6.

Le choc de l'invasion de 1914 constitua une grave fracture dans le domaine des transferts culturels, dont on ne se remettra en Belgique que des décennies plus tard. Outre l'impact de la violence des premiers mois de la guerre sur la population civile, la Belgique littéraire et artistique se reproche d'avoir idéalisé l'Allemagne. Mais le traumatisme est également de nature identitaire, dans la mesure où le grand voisin était partie prenante de la construction imaginaire du « mythe nordique », dont personne ne souhaitait la chute brutale, surtout du côté francophone.

En marge de l'occupation, toutefois, un curieux dialogue reprend avec la nouvelle génération, mais ses modalités en sont conditionnées par l'actualité de la *Flamenpolitik*²⁶, et ce quasiment à l'insu des protagonistes de cet échange. Le jeune poète Clément Pansaers édite la revue *Résurrection*, organe d'une nouvelle génération, également connu comme la première revue francophone qui offrit des expressionnistes allemands en traduction. Mais pour financer sa revue, on sait aujourd'hui que Pansaers bénéficia du soutien de l'occupant – probablement par l'intermédiaire de son ami, l'écrivain Carl Sternheim²⁷. Non pas que l'administration allemande se soit soudain éprise de poésie d'avant-garde, mais parce que, comme nous allons l'analyser, Pansaers inséra au début de chaque numéro un « Bulletin politique », dans lequel il plaidait avec autant de véhémence que d'opportunisme pour une séparation administrative de la Flandre et de la Wallonie, telle qu'elle fut effectivement exécutée dans le cadre de la *Flamenpolitik* en 1917.

On comprend que, dans ces circonstances, la réception de l'expressionnisme, si elle eut bel et bien lieu, fut entachée de suspicion et ne put provoquer une large adhésion. Il en fut de même de la dynamique d'échanges naissante entre le jeune expressionnisme flamand et, à nouveau, les milieux du *Sturm* après la guerre. Car le départ de Paul van Ostaïen à Berlin, par exemple, se fit aussi dans le cadre de son rejet de la Belgique unitaire paternaliste envers la culture flamande, et de ses sympathies avec un « activisme » militant, qui entendait profiter de l'occupation pour renverser les structures de l'État belge²⁸. Encore une fois, ce phéno-

²⁶ Ce terme désigne l'ensemble des mesures prises par l'occupant pour encourager les revendications du mouvement flamand en Belgique, dans le but stratégique de mieux diviser l'État belge. La plus spectaculaire fut la réouverture de l'Université de Gand, jusque là francophone, en néerlandais pendant la guerre.

²⁷ Hubert Roland, *La 'colonie' littéraire allemande en Belgique 1914-1918*, Bruxelles 2003, chapitre 8.

²⁸ Cf. Marc Reynebeau, *Dichter in Berlijn. De ballingschap van Paul van Ostaïen (1918-1921)*, Groot-Bijgaarden 1995.

mène de réception englobe idées esthétiques et politiques sur le mode de l'homologie.

L'exemple de *Résurrection*

Il semble que Clément Pansaers et sa revue *Résurrection* occupent une position unique dans le paysage littéraire belge. Déjà qualifié en 1922 de « seul véritable dadaïste qu'a connu la Belgique »²⁹, Pansaers se vit attribuer l'étiquette de précurseur car sa revue d'avant-garde avait déjà paru pendant la guerre. Publiées de décembre 1917 à mai 1918, les six livraisons de *Résurrection* traitent en premier lieu de sujets esthétiques et, en second lieu, de thèmes politiques. Dans ce qui suit, ce sont précisément ces bulletins politiques que nous soumettrons à une analyse discursive. Quoique ces textes aient une fonction mobilisatrice, univoque (et non esthétique), plusieurs fragments en restent relativement obscurs. Ces imprécisions ne font pas ressortir un effet esthétique, mais révèlent plutôt une *hésitation* dans le discours pansaerien, davantage encore qu'ils ne relèvent du trait stylistique personnel³⁰.

Dans ses bulletins politiques, Pansaers tient un plaidoyer fervent et univoque pour l'instauration d'une fédération flamando-wallonne. Sa proposition frappe d'abord par sa précision factuelle et bien élaborée et contraste ainsi avec ses autres prises de position où, comme le rappelle Jacques Marx, « on ne distingue toutefois pas encore avec une absolue netteté ce qui relève du message politique réel, et ce qui dépend de la réaction émotionnelle en face de la société capitaliste »³¹. S'agirait-il ici d'une concrétisation, ou encore d'une radicalisation de ses réflexions précédentes plus abstraites ? Le problème fondamental réside dans leur statut qui, nous allons le démontrer, sont non seulement beaucoup plus *relatives*, mais également beaucoup plus *ambivalentes*.

Mais avant d'en arriver là, précisons encore que les cinq bulletins se subdivisent en deux parties. Dans les deux premiers textes, Pansaers avance, de façon monologique, ses prises de positions principales. Les trois derniers textes, par contre, sont plus dialogiques (plus modérés

²⁹ Paul Neuhuys, « Poètes d'aujourd'hui », in: *Ça ira !*, 1922, 86. Cité dans Rik Sauwen, *L'esprit dada en Belgique*, Mémoire de licence, Leuven 1969.

³⁰ Benjamin Hennot affirme que, dans d'autres textes critiques, Pansaers manie également et « consciemment, une même syntaxe troublante que dans ses textes dadaïstes. » Voir Benjamin Hennot, « Clément Pansaers contra de 'dogmatische westerse mechanica' », in: Clément Pansaers, *Pan Pan voor de Poeper van de Neger Naakt*, Nijmegen 2003, 86.

³¹ Jacques Marx, « 'Résurrection' et les courants modernistes » in: Jean Weisgerber (éd.), *Les avant-gardes littéraires en Belgique*, Bruxelles 1991, 213-32, ici 221.

aussi), dans la mesure où ils apportent des nuances par rapport à ce qui précède et répondent, implicitement et explicitement, à des réactions de la part de quelques lecteurs.

Néanmoins, une première lecture pourrait toujours conclure à la même radicalité que celle des prises de position sur l'avenir de la Belgique. Ainsi, par exemple, nombreux sont les marqueurs temporels qui établissent une séparation très nette entre le passé d'« hier » et l'avenir de « demain ». Pourtant, le changement vient d'être déclenché par la guerre et ne se trouve que dans un stade initial, ce qui relativise immédiatement le statut des assertions, par exemple lorsqu'il dit : « Aujourd'hui *annonce pour demain* la confraternité des nations »³². Marc Quaghebeur parle à cet égard d'une « période d'incubation »³³. En dépit de ce statut de *potentialis*, il faut se poser la question de savoir jusqu'à quel point le changement – en gestation – prôné se veut vraiment radical. Est-ce que, sur le plan politique aussi, le seul dadaïste belge propose une manière de faire dadaïste, faisant donc table rase *complète* ? Il semble que non. Deux exemples l'attestent.

1. Dès le premier bulletin, Pansaers propose de « retremper [l'art, tout intellectualiste] dans la vie sociale »³⁴. Il explique que la place du poète est au centre de la vie, ce qui fait qu'il se voit obligé lui-même de passer de sujets esthétiques à des thèmes plus politiques. La question peut donc être reformulée plus concrètement – et dans les termes de Pansaers même : est-ce que l'avenir d'après guerre de la Belgique politique sera plutôt *révolution* ou *évolution* ? Il semble jouer sur les mots, lorsqu'il affirme, dans respectivement le premier et le quatrième bulletin que « la révolution a forcé l'évolution »³⁵ ou qu'il s'agit d'une « évolution, réforme forcées, si vous voulez, mais révolution quand même »³⁶. Chaque fois que la révolution – rupture par définition radicale – est invoquée, elle se joint d'autres dénominateurs, qui font référence à une racine sous-jacente (qui ne semble pas être touchée) et relativisent de la sorte la radicalité : l'« évolution », le « renouvellement », la « régénération », ou, peut-être l'exemple le plus saillant, la « *Résurrection* ».

2. Une « hésitation » similaire se produit au niveau de l'acception de l'« internationalisme ». Avec la révolution russe de 1917 – et la phraséologie de Pansaers prouve à suffisance et à maintes reprises qu'il y souscrit – l'importance de la notion ne peut être sous-estimée. Dans la lignée de la

³² Clément Pansaers, « Bulletin politique », in : *Résurrection*, 1, 1917, 37-9, ici 39. Nous soulignons.

³³ Marc Quaghebeur, *Balises pour l'histoire des lettres belges*, Bruxelles 1998, 118.

³⁴ Pansaers, « Bulletin politique », 38.

³⁵ Pansaers, « Bulletin politique », 38.

³⁶ Clément Pansaers, « Bulletin politique », in : *Résurrection*, 4, 1918, 4, 159-60, ici 159.

vague internationaliste, qui ne cessera de croître par après dans les différents courants et revues d'avant-garde, il annonce clairement la confraternité des nations ou la démolition des frontières étanches entre Flamands et Wallons ou entre d'autres peuples. Et pourtant, ici aussi, son internationalisme peut être dit *relatif*, dans la mesure où Pansaers le pense encore en termes nationaux. L'internationalisme ne rejette pas la nation, mais se greffe sur elle. Regardons de plus près l'alternance entre le point de vue nationaliste et internationaliste dans l'exemple suivant : « *Notre peuple nous apporte son industrie, donnons-lui une culture de valeur cosmopolite. Faisons de la Wallonie ce que la Belgique aurait dû réaliser – un boulevard international, où toutes les races se croisent et se mesurent confraternellement dans le domaine intellectuel et artistique* »³⁷. Le national et l'international alternent, certes, mais il y a plus. Il semble que la finalité de l'internationalisme réside dans le déploiement illimité de la propre individualité wallonne, dont une attitude cosmopolite fait partie intégrante. Par cette différence hiérarchique, il devient clair qu'il ne peut être question d'une dissolution des cloisons nationalistes, aboutissant ainsi à une communauté plus englobante. Le cosmopolitisme, tel que l'entend Pansaers, ne lève pas le national (dans un sens hégélien), mais le (re)formule en termes inter-nationalistes. L'art, tout en restant wallon, acquiert une valeur cosmopolite, lorsqu'il se mue en *exemplum* pour d'autres nations. Pansaers reformule ici un des clichés sur la Belgique, traditionnellement vue comme un carrefour de l'occident, un balcon sur l'Europe, un lieu où convergent l'esprit germanique et roman³⁸, etc. Bref, prenant encore en compte que, selon Marc Dachy, « l'enjeu du supranationalisme contre le nationalisme sera en permanence au cœur du combat des avant-gardes post-futuristes »³⁹, la position de Pansaers peut à juste titre être qualifiée d'*intermédiaire*.

Finalement, notre hypothèse est encore corroborée par un témoignage de Pansaers lui-même, dans lequel il avance qu'il ne rejette pas le nationalisme en tant que tel. Par contre, c'est plutôt l'épithète belge qui lui pose plus de problèmes : « Que sais-je, disait-il, si j'avais été d'un autre pays, peut-être eussé-je été nationaliste : mais nationaliste belge. Il n'y a

³⁷ Clément Pansaers, « Bulletin politique », in: *Résurrection*, 2, 1917, 76-80, ici 79. Nous soulignons.

³⁸ La question de l'inter- ou supra-nationalisme connaîtra une suite dans plusieurs revues (néerlandophones et francophones) d'après-guerre qui, comme *Résurrection*, s'inscrivent toutes dans ce sillage internationaliste et pacifiste (comme *L'Art libre*, *Lumière*, *Ruimte*, etc.). Notons toutefois que Pansaers rejette explicitement la catégorie de « race », qui reste néanmoins omniprésente dans d'autres revues comme *L'Art libre* par exemple.

³⁹ Marc Dachy, « Meeting pansarérien », in: *Plein Chant*, 39-40, 1988, 15-68, ici 26.

pas de mot plus ridicule que le mot belge. Observez la figure d'un enfant qui ne l'a jamais entendu et dites *belge*. Il rit, il rit aux éclats. Je parie tout ce qu'on veut qu'il rit »⁴⁰.

Conclusion provisoire

Des péripéties et avatars du dialogue belgo-allemand exposés ici, il serait possible de tirer des conclusions de portée plus générale. On insistera d'abord sur l'importance certaine du facteur générationnel, qu'il serait possible d'envisager en termes sociologiques. Selon une stratégie d'entrisme connue, les jeunes « meneurs » des avant-gardes comme Pansaers ou Van Ostaijen se dressent contre les aînés pour prendre position dans le champ. Pour ce faire, ils n'hésitent pas à avoir recours à un discours identitaire nouveau, partie intégrante de la « régénération » souhaitée. C'est bien cet élan de nature esthétique qui conditionne toute considération politique des nouveaux passeurs, pas l'inverse. Mais aux yeux du monde extérieur, le malentendu est évidemment total et, lorsque la guerre radicalise et instrumentalise toute approche identitaire, on ne retient que leur manque de patriotisme.

Par ailleurs, on devrait pouvoir à l'avenir oser la comparaison avec d'autres avant-gardes « périphériques » (pays nordiques et de l'Europe de l'est) des grandes nations culturelles, ces dernières se distinguant par un mouvement ambivalent caractéristique dans leur rapport aux premières, entre la générosité d'une ouverture cosmopolite et le souci plus ou moins latent d'assimilation.

⁴⁰ Cité dans Aragon, « Clément Pansaers », in: *Plein Chant*, 39-40, 1988, 5-13, ici 9. Dans les bulletins politiques, il exprime la même idée, selon laquelle la Belgique est trop restreinte (« la petite vérité belge ») pour être significative ou pour s'en faire.

Historizing Modern Art: The “Difficult” Names

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This article focuses on how the paradigms of art history, which have been current until recently, have tended to marginalize artists with a heterogeneous and multifaceted identity. I am specifically interested in the difficulties of including in a historical narrative – both of the European avant-gardes and of Bulgarian art – the names and works of artists Georges Papazoff (who was closely related to surrealism) and Nicolay Diulgheroff (who for a while joined the Italian futurists in Turin). These two Bulgarian artists, I aim to show, led a nomadic life and worked in various regions in Europe, thereby acquiring a multicultural and multi-regional identity. As a result, their names have gone missing in histories of art, both in their adoptive motherland, in the artistic milieus where an essential part of their work was developed, and in the histories of art in their place of origin, in the places where they came from, where they made their first appearance and to which they sometimes returned for exhibitions and lectures.

Georges Papazoff (1894-1972) studied architecture and park design in Prague. He visited, during a stay in Munich in 1918, the studio of Hans Hofmann, an expressionist at that time and one of the founders of abstract expressionism in the US during the 1930s.¹ In Hofmann’s studio he met Hans Reichel and other young artists and future protagonists of the avant-garde. His next “stop” was Vienna in 1920-1922. After that, in 1923, he went to Berlin, where he met Oskar Kokoschka² and participated in the November Group Exhibition showing his work *Pferde* (Horses).³ The young artist also spent a few months in Switzerland, where he met Paul Klee, and settled finally in Paris, from 1924 onward, with frequent re-

¹ See Cynthia Goodman, *Hans Hofmann*, München 1991.

² Later on, in 1935, Oskar Kokoschka wrote an introduction in a catalogue for one of Papazoff’s exhibitions. See *Изложба Папазов. Каталог*, 6-28. X. 1935, Галерия КООП, София, 1-2.

³ Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung 1923. Katalog-Nr. 1298 *Pferde*, Saal-Nr. 27.



Fig. 21: Georges Papazoff, *The Messengers*, 1935. Oil on canvas, 34 x 26 cm.
Courtesy of the National Art Gallery, Sofia.

turns to his homeland Bulgaria. Papazoff joined the surrealist circle and in 1925 took part in two exhibitions with Hans Arp, Max Ernst, Paul Klee, André Masson, Joan Miró, and others. From 1926 onwards, thanks to Marcel Duchamp, the artist participated regularly in the Société Anonyme's exhibitions in New York.⁴

Throughout this period at least some critical attention went to Papazoff abroad. One can find an entry on him in a *Thieme-Becker* volume of 1932 (when the artist was 38 years old), describing him as “Anhänger des Surrealismus”.⁵ He was called the “franc-tireur” (fighter) of surrealism by Jacques Baron,⁶ while Philippe Soupault, upholder of the idea of an unclassifiable multifaceted identity, would later write: “Papazoff adopts

⁴ See Andrei Nakov, *Papazoff: Franc-Tireur du Surréalisme*, Bruxelles 1973, 148; *Papazoff, Catalogue*. Text by Jacques Baron. Galleria Annunciata, Milano. 19.01 – 5.02.1974; *Papazoff. Œuvres de 1923 à 1932. Catalogue*. Text by Philippe Soupault. Exposition Galerie de Seine, Paris, Janvier 1975.

⁵ See Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker (eds.), *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Vol. 26, Leipzig, 1932, 217.

⁶ See the Preface in Nakov, *Papazoff*.



Fig. 22: Georges Papazoff, *Love on the Beach*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 34 x 46 cm.
Courtesy of the National Art Gallery, Sofia.

the spirit of surrealism without losing at that his autonomy [...]. Papazoff becomes at that time one of the most authentic representatives of the new surrealist painting, parallel to Max Ernst and André Masson”.⁷

Even so, the anti-conformist behavior of Papazoff – among other things he refused to sign André Breton’s surrealist manifestos⁸ – ultimately led to his marginalization and exclusion from the history of the avant-gardes abroad. He preserved his autonomy, but his work nowadays is rarely mentioned.⁹ His painting, it would seem, has become impossible to classify stylistically.

Similar observations can be made about Nicolay Diulgheroff (1901-1982), who would eventually settle down in Turin in 1926 and forge close ties with Marinetti’s futurist movement. Before that, in Bulgarian art criticism the name of Diulgheroff was mentioned only on occasion. When it was mentioned it was surrounded by the aura of an avant-garde artist, not least because he was educated in prestigious artistic institutions in Europe, including the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna, the Neue Schule für Kunst in Dresden and the Bauhaus.¹⁰

His solo exhibition in 1924 in Sofia, in the gallery on 16 Aksakov Street, clearly illustrated his talent and erudition, the experience, too, he had acquired through encounters with expressionism and constructivism. In that same year some shorter texts appeared in the Bulgarian reviews *Plamak* (Flame) by Nicolay Raynov, signed with the pseudonym Nic,¹¹ and in *More* (Sea) by Geo Milev. Reproductions of his works were published in *Plamak* (book IV, April 25th), *More* (book 2) and *Chernozem* (Fertile soil, 1924, issue 617). Geo Milev emphasized the success of Diulgheroff, who at that moment, after his training at the Bauhaus, was related to cubism and constructivism. Nikolay Raynov called him “the first Bulgarian

⁷ “Papazoff adopte l’esprit du Surréalisme sans perdre pour autant son indépendance [...]. Papazoff devient alors un des représentants les plus authentiques de la nouvelle peinture surréaliste, parallèlement à Max Ernst et André Masson”. Soupault, quoted in Nakov, *Papazoff*, 47.

⁸ Philippe Soupault, “Georges Papazoff”, in: *Écrits sur la peinture*, Paris 1980, 306-7.

⁹ The most recent publication is: Irina Genova (ed.), *Nicolay Diulgheroff*. Texts by Giorgio Di Genova and Irina Genova, Sofia 2008.

¹⁰ See Marzio Pinottini, *Diulgheroff futurista. Collages e polimaterici 1927 - 1977*. Arte moderna italiana Nr. 75, Milano 1977, 127-8. In an autobiographical note which the artist filled in personally in May 1934, his study in Bauhaus is not mentioned, probably because the school, in Berlin at the time, was closed down a year earlier by the national-socialists.

¹¹ Nikolay Raynov used this pseudonym only here. See: Иван Богданов, *Речник на българските псевдоними*, Второ основно преработено и разширено издание. София, 1978 (Ivan Bogdanov, *Dictionary of Bulgarian Pseudonyms*, second edition, thoroughly reworked and expanded, Sofia 1978).

cubist". He noted the likely discrepancy between the Bulgarian public taste and the aesthetic of Diulgheroff,¹² but he also assessed Diulgheroff's "evident artistic talent".

After the exhibition in 1924 it seems that the Bulgarian public lost track of Diulgheroff – the periodicals published neither his works nor the works of the futurists' circle in Turin, to which he had now affiliated himself. Sirak Skitnik, an art critic and artist, published, in the newspaper *Slovo* (Discourse), a translation of an excerpt from an *La Revue Moderne* issue devoted to Diulgheroff on the occasion of his participation in an exhibition of the futurists in Paris in 1928.¹³ Tellingly, no mention was made in either publications about Diulgheroff's exhibition in Sofia five years earlier.

In 1934, after his move to Turin, Diulgheroff planned a big solo exhibition in Sofia. In a letter to Tullio d'Albisola from 18 June he specified that he had prepared 250 pieces – architecture, painting and publicity – and asked him for photos of his house in Albisola, his first architectural achievement.¹⁴ Diulgheroff's choice to include photographs of architecture, publicity and ceramics, along with painting expresses his holistic aesthetic. (This sharply contrasts with the near exclusive interest in his painting in more recent times.) In Bulgaria, the main fields of his highly interartistic expression in the 1930s in Italy – architecture, interior design and publicity – were hardly discussed. In an insufficiently modernized cultural situation Diulgheroff's idea of a total work of art was shared only in a very small circle. As such, it was important for him to present his views on art in Sofia. Why Diulgheroff eventually gave up the exhibition in the last moment is not known, but this second exhibition in Sofia did not take place. For political reasons, a third meeting with the Bulgarian public during the 1970s, so much desired by Diulgheroff,¹⁵ did not take

¹² "His pictures are compositions of paints and free forms – art which is incomprehensible for our public used to the traditional taste in painting". *Сн. Пламък (Flame)*, 4, 1924, 144.

¹³ Сирак Скитник, "Изкуството ни в чужбина", в рубриката: Изкуство и публика, в: вестник *Слово* (Sirak Skitnik, "Our Art Abroad", in the Column: Art and Public, in: *Discourse*, 2051, 1929, 1.) Reference to *La Revue Moderne*, 19, 1929.

¹⁴ The letter read: "Ora senti amico mio, stò preparando una mia personale a Sofia, molto importante perché completa 250 opere architettura – pittura – pubblicità – quasi tutte realizzazioni. Vorrei aggiungere una serie di 5/6 fotografie della vostra villa. Vorresti far fare anche qualche fotografia delle tue ceramiche? Ti abbraccio, tuo Nicolay". Published in: *Quaderni di Tullio d'Albisola. Lettere di Edoardo Alfieri, Lino Berzoini, Nicolay Diulgheroff, Escodame, Italo Lorio, Tina Mennye, Bruno Munari, Pippo Oriani ... (1928-1939)*. A cura di Danilo Presotto, Editrice Liguria 1981, 19.

¹⁵ In a letter to Asen Tonev from 5 March 1978, kept as a typewritten transcript in the Art Gallery of Kyustendil, Diulgheroff shared his desire to visit Bulgaria, whether he succeeded in organizing a personal exhibition or not.

place either, and ever since, for the professionally educated public in Bulgaria he has remained a familiar name with unfamiliar art works.

Already in 1929, in a special issue of *Der Sturm* dedicated to contemporary Bulgarian art,¹⁶ Sirak Skitnik had paid attention to the work of both Georges Papazoff and Nikolay Diulgheroff, observing that both worked outside of Bulgaria, nonetheless regarding their work as part of Bulgarian painting.¹⁷ This is the only historizing narrative from a Bulgarian author which includes the names of Papazoff and Diulgheroff, however. Importantly, it was addressed to a foreign public. Later on, in 1938, Sirak Skitnik in another article intended for the public abroad, “Bulgarian Art Today”, no longer mentioned their work.¹⁸ As such, both in and outside Bulgaria, the two artists began to enter oblivion – although Papazoff, unlike Diulgheroff, would meet at least a moment of recognition in Bulgaria in the 1930s, as we will see.

Both the name of Diulgheroff and the one of Papazoff are missing in the 1930s studies of modern Bulgarian art by Andrey Protić,¹⁹ as well as in later studies, of the 1940s, by Nikola Mavrodinov.²⁰ The National Museum bought not even one piece by Diulgheroff at the time. In the case of Papazoff, when the National Museum acquired a work of his (*Bearer of Light*),²¹ Nikola Mavrodinov, curator at the Museum at the time, did mention Papazoff in his books as a Parisian artist who was not representative of Bulgarian art – to little surprise his work is missing from the National Art Museum catalogue from 1971. For public collections as well as for historians of modern art in Bulgaria Diulgheroff and Papazoff thus became foreigners.

Diulgheroff's reception abroad was not all that different, however. After a period of remarkable activity in the futurist group in Turin, in the late 1930s he retreated from the circle of Marinetti and totally withdrew into the field of architecture and interior design. As with Papazoff, this led

¹⁶ Sirak Skitnik, „Die neue bulgarische Malerei“, in: *Der Sturm*, Sonderheft: Junge bulgarische Kunst, Berlin, 1929, Oktober-November, Heft 2 und 3, 22-7.

¹⁷ In his article Sirak Skitnik stated: “Thus, we have named almost all that leads to the future of Bulgarian painting” (26).

¹⁸ Sirak Skitnik, “Bulgarian Art of Today”, in: *The Studio*, March 1938, 116-41.

¹⁹ Андрей Протић, *50 години българско изкуство*, София, Том I, 1933; Том II, 1934 (Andrey Protić, *50 Years Bulgarian Art*, Sofia, Vol. I, 1933; Vol. II, 1934).

²⁰ Никола Мавродинов, *Новото българско изкуство*, София 1946; *Новата българска живопис*, София 1947 (Nikola Mavrodinov, *The New Bulgarian Art*, Sofia 1946; *The New Bulgarian Painting*, Sofia 1947).

²¹ See Доротея Соколова/Татяна Димитрова, Съст., *Никола Мавродинов. Каталог на изложба*, София 1992, с. 2 (Doroteya Sokolova & Tatyana Dimitrova (eds.), *Nikola Mavrodinov. Catalogue of the Exhibition*, Sofia 1992, 2).

to his gradual marginalization abroad. In the years before the Second World War his situation as a foreigner would hardly have been favorable either in his professional activity or in his everyday life. Above all, it is obvious that, in part as a result of his withdrawal from futurism, Diulgheroff in Italy too was soon seen as a foreigner by public art institutions and that over the decades his works have not been a priority when gathering their public collections.

Multiple cultural and regional identities, so it appears, make it difficult to include certain artists in established historical narratives. Even though some of these two artists' works can be placed without difficulty among the artistic events in one or another milieu, their heterogeneous, multifaceted identity clearly put(s) historical paradigms to the test, as these artists appear largely excluded from their narratives.

With Diulgheroff, as well as with other artists whose names do not derive from prevalent European languages, the difficulties begin with the name itself. Nicola or Nicolay? Dyulgerov, Diulgheroff, Djulgheroff or even Dulgeroff? In Bulgaria, for Geo Milev and Nicolay Raynov, Diulgheroff was *Nicolay*. For Sirak Skitnik he was *Nicola*. According to his birth certificate, the name of the artist was *Nicola*. In the Latin alphabet *Nicolay* or *Nicolaj* appeared as his signature after he went on to study in Austria and Germany. Most likely, he was called that abroad and he accepted it as his second or other name. Probably due to his acquaintance with him through the German milieu, Geo Milev also called him Nicolay in his article. However, on an information form, which the artist completed for the historical archives of contemporary art in Venice in May 1934, Diulgheroff put down his name as *Nicola*.²² The transcription of the family name in the Latin alphabet, especially of the diphthong "iu", leads to three variants used by foreign authors. The artist signed himself as "Diulgheroff" and the double "f" at the end recalls the beginning of his career in a German speaking environment. Today, depending on the spelling and alphabet used – in Latin or Cyrillic alphabet – the internet each time generates different texts and images – non-coinciding worlds of one and the same personality. This unstable name is meaningful for the unstable, multifaceted identity it signals.

Yet Diulgheroff challenges narratives of art history not just by his cultural and regional nomadism. Equally important is the multifaceted nature of his professional work, his art itself. Tracing the art of Diulgheroff, one could be surprised to find out the following paradox: his

²² The form completed by Diulgheroff is published in: Pinottini, *Diulgheroff futurista*, 14.



Fig. 23: Nicolay Diulgheroff, Sketch of an industrial building, published in *La Citta Nuova*, 6, 20 March 1934, 5.

name *is* topical to an extent today and Bulgarian experts react in a lively way and with due respect when he is mentioned, yet the artist's works are not in the public museums and can be seen by the general public only in reproductions from catalogues, encyclopaedia and books. In the common cultural space, the name is present, then, but the works are absent.

Nonetheless, a professionally gathered private art collection in Turin by the Pinottini brothers, as well as the Diulgheroffs' archives make it possible today to present the vast and heterogeneous art production of Nicolay Diulgheroff as a whole. Given Diulgheroff's multi-disciplinary take on art a presentation of his work as a whole would be no more than logical. Writings about Diulgheroff quickly bring out why. They contain mainly catalogues from solo and common exhibitions as well as entries in encyclopaedia. In early publications of influential authors, such as Enrico Crispolti,²³ the artist is most often presented in the context of the second futurism in Italy – the manifestations of the movement after the First World War. A considerable part of Diulgheroff's art from the 1930s onwards – architectural realizations, interior design of public and private spaces, advertising, fair pavilion design, etc. – remains peripheral here.

²³ Enrico Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo: Torino 1923-1938*, Torino 1961.



Fig. 24: Nicolay Diulgheroff, Poster for the *Futurist Exhibition* in the City Theatre of Alessandria, 1930. Typographic print, 70 x 50 cm. Private collection, Turin, Italy.

The first book entirely dedicated to Diulgheroff, Marzio Pinottini's book *Diulgheroff the Futurist. Collages and polymaterials 1927-1977*, published in Milan in 1977, when the artist was 75 years old, presented his collage works. In the catalogues from Diulgheroff's exhibitions we can see that his art has always been discussed, in accordance with his own view, under the sign of futurism.²⁴ In 2005 Valeria Garuzzo's book *Nicola Diulgheroff the Architect* was published.²⁵ The author, herself an architect, studied the whole of his architectural production on the basis of (mainly family) archives, publications in the press and catalogues. The consistent factual exposition is a quality of the work. Garuzzo also includes other fields of Diulgheroff's artistic practice – on the illustrated pages one can find reproductions of paintings, advertisements, ceramics – but, as a whole, the book primarily deals with his architecture and interior design.

This clear difficulty of discussing simultaneously Diulgheroff's different art-“faces” raises once again the question of identity – chosen and constructed – this time experienced as a professional one. The developing modern cities, the numerous industrial fairs and exhibitions were privileged places for the manifestations of the futurists, and Diulgheroff shared their enthusiasm when it came to the so-called applied arts shaping the everyday environment. This artistic view appeared in different places and had different ideological features in the 1920s and the artist was well aware of the manifestations of this understanding. Diulgheroff's artistic education after all took place in a couple of prestigious artistic centres, including the Bauhaus from his period in Weimar. He contributed to the artistic enthusiasm connected with the rapid technological advance by placing personal accents informed by his versatile artistic education, and his talent for combining the rigid architectonics of forms with the dynamics of images. The artist devoted his talent to the creation of spaces for everyday life. In the 1930s, Diulgheroff made street billboards on aluminium panels. In his paintings and collages, as well as in late Plexiglas and light constructions, Diulgheroff experimented and (re)created impressive forms, compositions, and worlds, which echoed the spaces of the

²⁴ *Nicolay Diulgheroff* dal 21 ottobre al 3 novembre 1972. Viotti Galleria d'arte moderna. Torino. Con testo di Albino Galvano; *Diulgheroff futurista*. 26.3 – 26.4.1977. Galleria d'arte Narciso, Torino. Con testo di Marzio Pinottini; *Diulgheroff futurista*. 19.11.1977 – 8.1.1978. Il Dialogo Galleria d'arte moderna, Milano. Con testo di Marzio Pinottini; *Ottant'anni di Diulgheroff futurista*. 10.12.1981 – 9.1.1982. Galleria d'arte Narciso, Torino. Con testo di Marzio Pinottini; *Diulgheroff futurista e i Sindacati Artistici di via Sacchi a Torino*. Autori: Antonio Forchino, Sally Paola Anselmo, Marzio Pinottini, Massimo Malfa. Circolo degli Artisti di Torino, Torino 2002.

²⁵ Valeria Garuzzo, *Nicola Diulgheroff architetto*, Venezia 2005.

everyday conceived by him. The artist created images with other means, beyond mere representation. The abstract structures from his paintings and collages moved into his interior design, into the material environment and architecture, and put the notion of “reality” up for discussion. For Diulgheroff, the autonomy of the picture was inseparable from the pragmatics of the material/object environment. This multi-faced professional identity made it difficult to include Diulgheroff’s artistic activity in modern art narratives, both in Bulgaria and in Italy, especially after futurist ideologue Marinetti began to show himself in agreement with the official political power.

In contrast to Diulgheroff, Georges Papazoff came back to Sofia carrying out an unprecedented array of artistic activities in 1934 and 1935. Papazoff presented two solo exhibitions in Sofia in 1934 and in 1935.²⁶ From 1933 to 1935, the artist organized a sequence of sometimes simultaneous solo exhibitions in Stockholm, Chicago, New York, Milan, Zagreb, and Prague. The reception of Papazoff’s exhibitions in Sofia by artistic circles failed to match his expectations.²⁷ By then, apparently, he was seen as part of Western, foreign art and could not be affiliated with any artistic trend in Bulgaria. Still, along with his exhibitions, Papazoff gave public lectures (two in the Alliance Française in Sofia), which were widely announced in the press.

He further gathered his texts about art in a book in Bulgarian, which he published in 1938 in Sofia: *Paris. Work and Destiny of Great Artists* (Париж. Творчество и съдба на велики художници). The book was issued in 6000 copies (quite a big circulation for Bulgaria) in the library series of *Zaveti*, a magazine of an eclectic nature. The book is of interest,²⁸ first of all, because it shows that Papazoff decided to publish his texts on modern and avant-garde artists *in Bulgaria*. The book attempted to write the history of the avant-gardes for a wider public, which explains his popular language use, rough, without refinements or nuances. Papazoff was convinced that the avant-garde could not be understood without the experience of modern art. To reach surrealism, he began his book with the

²⁶ Both Exhibitions were in the KOOP (KOOPI) Gallery, Sofia.

²⁷ See Татьяна Димитрова, “Рецепцията на модернизма между двете световни войни: Георги Папазов в България”, in: *Проблеми на изкуството*, 4, 1995 (Dimitrova, Tatyana, “The Reception of Modernism between the Two World Wars: Georges Papazoff in Bulgaria”).

²⁸ See also: Ирина Генова, “Историзиране на модерното изкуство – липсващите имена. Жорж Папазов”, in: *Изкуствоведски четения* 2007, София 2007 (Irina Genova, “Historicizing Modern Art – the Missing Names. Georges Papazoff”, in: *Art Historians Readings* 2007, Sofia 2007), 453-60.

work of Eugène Delacroix, Eduard Manet and Claude Monet. The book of 87 pages contains parts named: “From Cubism to Surrealism”; “Futurism”; “The Dadaists”; “Breton and Surrealism”; “The Avant-garde in World Painting”; “The Real in Painting”; “The Real in Abstract Painting”.

His own writings about art history, including his later book *Frères Drenovi* published in France in 1951, are of further interest because they allow us to assess how he placed his own work, when he himself assumed the role of the historian, one who makes classifications. Unsurprisingly, Papazoff, who in the beginning, in a Parisian milieu, was related to surrealism, and who in Milan, at the time of his exhibition in 1934, was called “the Bulgarian futurist”, declared that he did not like to be attached to theories.²⁹ Papazoff’s discourse regarding surrealism, in *Paris. Work and Destiny of Great Artists*, is quite telling in this respect, because it does allow us to make some claims about his own views of his artistic identity. In the part entitled “Breton and Surrealism” we read the following:

In his manifesto, Breton clearly outlines his plan which artists, writers and poets had to follow in their work and given the circumstances they were fully dependent on it. However, the artist, having fallen for Breton’s giftedness and having been forced to develop according to a poet’s plan, completely lost his personal freedom.³⁰

And further on: “From 1924 onward, flying proudly his flag, Breton sets off from France his fantastic fires all over the world. Today there are groups of his followers in many European countries”. Although he thus acknowledged Breton’s role in founding surrealism, Papazoff stood up for the independence of every artist. “In the Parisian surrealist movement”, he observed, “the artists, with few exceptions, played the same role as their colleagues under Marinetti. But it are those exceptions that work regardless of the frameworks of Breton’s plan [...]. When we think today of surrealism we shouldn’t forget two things. First, the common surrealist movement in the entire life of a man, led by Breton, and second, the surrealist painting as a manifestation of a purely artistic development with its own life, regardless of Breton”.

It is important to repeat that, unlike his later *Frères Drenovi*, Papazoff’s book on the Parisian artists was published in Bulgaria. His opinion and statements about the surrealist milieu, in which he himself participated,

²⁹ Repeatedly in his book *Frères Drenovi*, Paris 1951.

³⁰ Жорж Папазов, “Бретон и сюрреализмът”, in: *Париж. Творчество и съдба на велики художници*, София 1938, с. 73 (Georges Papazoff, “Breton and Surrealism”, in: *Paris. Work and Destiny of Great Artists*, Sofia 1938, 73). Subsequent quotes from the same page.

and about Breton's popularity, thereby remained accessible only for a Bulgarian public and, thus, isolated from the debates on the avant-garde abroad.

In "The Phenomenon of Blurring", Andrzej Turowski³¹ discusses the historizing of avant-gardes from Central and Eastern Europe against the backdrop of the problem of identity. Central to his critical reflection is the notion of "marginality", which ultimately questions the coherence of programs and trends in the centre. In the margins the use of notions of stylistic tendencies becomes problematic, Turowski shows, and Papazoff seems to illustrate this perfectly. Though at first glance there is a discrepancy between the two positions of Papazoff – as an artist, who didn't like to be classified according to any artistic tendencies and theories, and as a historian, who upheld the classification of works and artists in artistic trends – in fact the situation is a common one. As Turowski notes: "The history of art, which the avant-garde creates [...], neglects the avant-garde's marginality. The history of art, written from the positions of marginality, cannot neglect the avant-garde". Georges Papazoff consciously chose his autonomy and marginality in French artistic circles. This, however, does not mean that by narrating these circles' history for the Bulgarian public he possessed a system of notions, different from that of modernism and the avant-garde in the West. Thus, in his book Papazoff created a narrative in which he himself could not fit.

Today, the artistic work of key figures like Georges Papazoff and Nikolay Diulgheroff, admitting the essential differences between them, has a chance to become a part of art history's discursive field within a different paradigm – that of the critical interest in the impact of a hybrid cultural identity.

³¹ Andrzej Turowski, "The Phenomenon of Blurring", in: Timothy O. Benson (ed.), *Central European Avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930*, Los Angeles 2002, 362-73. Longer version, translated from Polish in Bulgarian, in: Анжей Туrowski, "Феноменът за замъглените очертания", in: *Разказвайки образа*, Ангелов, Ангел / Генова, Ирина, Съст., София 2003, 7-30.

The Insignia of Modernity and “le mouvement Apollinaire”

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In 1919 aspiring Belgian poet Clément Pansaers sought the acquaintance of dada impresario Tristan Tzara, introducing himself as an adherent of “le mouvement Apollinaire”.¹ It is as if, having died a year earlier, Apollinaire had passed from being a man to being an entire avant-garde tendency, a portal to vanguard aspirations as such. Pansaers’ hunch proved to be correct: the poet who’d been baptized by ‘Pataphysics’, promoted cubism, acknowledged the force of futurism, was among the claimants to simultanéisme, and coined the word *surréalisme*, was not only an influential poet but a figurehead who made modernity legible as an intelligible destination for literature and art. Matthew Josephson, editor of *Broom*, predicted that Apollinaire would prove to be the “forerunner of almost everything of importance [...] that will take place in the literature of the next generation”, because he had “urged the poets of this time to be at least as daring as the mechanical wizards who exploited the airplane, wireless telegraphy, chemistry, the submarine, the cinema, the phonograph, what-not”.² In Walter Benjamin’s colorful observation, “He ex-

¹ “Please take a notice of my adhesion to your group”, Pansaers wrote, clarifying that “Cocteau has arrived these days for a lecture in Brussels on the movement Apollinaire etc.” Quoted in: Hubert F. van den Berg, *The Import of Nothing: How Dada Came, Saw and Vanished in the Low Countries (1915-1929)*, New Haven 2002, 25.

² Will Bray, “Apollinaire: or Let Us Be Troubadors”, in: *Secession*, 1, Spring 1922, 10-1. The author also cast an approving glance at the *Littérature* group (Aragon, Soupault, Breton), suggesting that “The Apollinaire strain is in these writers” (10). Bray was a pseudonym of Matthew Josephson, editor of *Broom*, who continued the accolade in his own magazine. “Apollinaire runs all the risks, obeys no rules, and writes for fun”, he observed. “When you have rebelled against the principles of harmony and the Three Unities, you must perfect your metaphysic of disorganization. And so flight, dissociation are most characteristic of Apollinaire’s poetry and prose. They lend the element of surprise, of super-realism”. Josephson had the audacity to suggest that even the author of *Ulysses* might yet have something to learn from Apollinaire; for as the poet demonstrated, “The whole tone scale is evolved upon the instrument itself. Admirers of a certain redoubtable Irish prosateur will find much to wonder at from the point of view of virtuosity in Apollinaire” (Matthew

tracted from his own existence like a magician from a stovepipe hat whatever one asked of him: omelettes, goldfish, ball gowns, pocket watches. He was the Bellachini of literature".³ Benjamin's reference to the famous 19th-century magician invites the thought that, like Houdini later on, Apollinaire could never be confined to an apparently secure receptacle. Such a figure certainly merits Roger Shattuck's characterization of him as a veritable "ringmaster of the arts".⁴

What was it about Apollinaire that made him seem eligible as a movement all by himself? He was hardly a guru figure, like Walt Whitman;⁵ nor, as a poet, did he garner the cultivated mystique of Mallarmé or Stefan George. He did not personify European cultural sophistication like Rilke or Valéry, and he was far from being an agitator like Marinetti (despite its dispensation of shit and roses, "L'Antitradition futuriste" comes across as a manifesto that wants to be *liked*).⁶ Like Ezra Pound, however, Apollinaire was an eclectic champion of the arts. To get a sense of how Apollinaire struck his contemporaries, consider the commemorative issue of Pierre Albert-Birot's journal *SIC* (January/February 1919), with elegies and memoirs by Louis Aragon, Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, Francis Picabia, Pierre Reverdy, André Salmon, Tristan Tzara and twenty others.⁷ Aragon imagines the poet embracing the pan-European spirit of

Josephson, "Comment: Apollinaire", in: *Broom*, 4, March 1923, 281). It is presumably Josephson who wrote the advertisement copy for his translation of *The Poet Assassinated*, back page of this same issue of *Broom*: "Possessed with an Aristophanic demon of satire Apollinaire wrote the most astonishing prose and poetry of his day [...]. His sway spread through the whole continent as poet, novelist, art critic and leader of divers revolutions and buccaneering expeditions in painting and literature. His rebellious spirit was at the bottom of all the artistic upheavals of the Twentieth Century".

³ "Er holte sie aus seiner Existenz wie ein Zauberer aus dem Zylinderhut, was man gerade von ihm verlangt: Eierkuchen, Goldfische, Ballkleider, Tachenuhren. Er war der Bellachini der Literatur". Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels, Frankfurt am Main 1972, 177.

⁴ Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*, rev. ed., New York 1968, 254.

⁵ Cf. Michael Robertson, *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples*, Princeton 2008.

⁶ Notwithstanding the obvious differences, Apollinaire actually shared much with Rilke, particularly a pan-European outlook. Many of the poems in *Alcools* are tinged with the antiquarian spirit and heraldic glamor of Rilke's early work; and *Bestiaire* is as decisive an instant of modernist medievalism as Rilke's *Das Stundenbuch*.

⁷ My choice of this commemorative issue of *SIC* is strictly heuristic. Some measure of Apollinaire's impact is abundantly documented in *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* by Willard Bohn (Albany, NY 1997). Despite its cascade of documentation, extending from Germany and England to the United States, Mexico, Argentina and Spain, Bohn's study omits Italy, Portugal, Russia, and the countries of Eastern Europe. His three hundred pages could easily be doubled by taking these milieus into account – to say nothing of such materials that have subsequently come to light in the places he covered, like American poet

Goethe.⁸ Cendrars envisions him as a magus, raising himself from the dead; and many of the contributors characterize him as “enchanteur”. Other references are instructive. Most important, perhaps, is curiosity: he “possessed the proof of perpetual youth: utter curiosity”, observed Lucien Descaves.⁹ Roger Allard expanded on this theme, emphasizing that Apollinaire’s curiosity led him in all directions: among the bric-a-brac of modernity he sought out correspondences with the past, pursuing baroque analogies, and delighting in anachronism.¹⁰ Along the same lines, Roch Grey (Hélène d’Oettingen) said Apollinaire had created “a culinary movement in the world of letters”;¹¹ and while I take this to mean that his gift for combining thematic ingredients was unsurpassed, it’s interesting to note how often the contributors to this issue of *SIC* recall actual meals. Apollinaire, after all, was a legendary gourmand. And this brings us to the question of *taste*, something rarely associated with the avant-garde. Apollinaire made palpable the *zest* of a bohemian life in part because of his knack for sniffing out quality in every milieu. He could *taste* the potential of a painting just as he could *relish* the contrapuntal feats of a street juggler. In part, what enticed people to “le mouvement Apollinaire” was the promise of decanting – *degustation*.

Louis Zukofsky’s book *Le Style Apollinaire*, the published edition of which was obliterated by a warehouse fire soon after its 1934 publication (the original English text finally appeared as *The Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*, published by Wesleyan University Press in 2004).

⁸ “Mais peut-être le bruit des trains allemands sur la rive ennemie m’hallucina quand j’entendis Guillaume Apollinaire dire comme jadis avec assurance: ‘J’ai l’esprit goethien’”. Louis Aragon, “Oraison funèbre”, in: *SIC*, 37/38/39, Jan./Feb. 1919, 283.

⁹ “Guillaume Apollinaire possédait le gage d’une jeunesse perpétuelle: toutes les curiosités”. Lucien Descaves, untitled, in: *SIC*, 37/38/39, Jan./Feb. 1919, 289 (*note*: the page number as printed is 280, but in fact the page in sequence is 289). Surely this curiosity contributed to the homages that kept appearing as late as 1928, as in an issue of *ReD*, the Prague based review of the Devetsil organization. Like earlier obituaries, such as the one published in *Current Opinion* in 1919, *ReD* reprinted Picasso’s pencil profile of the poet in uniform with bandaged head, perpetuating the myth that he was among the war dead: in fact, he was a victim of the postwar influenza epidemic.

¹⁰ “Dans les choses nouvelles il cherchait surtout le rappel du passé et jouissait d’y découvrir de lointaines et mobiles concordances. Il n’avait guère le sentiment de la mode, ni même des objets véritablement modernes, mais à une degré très aigu celui du démodé, de la curiosité, des analogies gracieuses et baroques. Il aimait les orgues de barbarie, les gymnases en plein air, les chanteurs et les saltimbanques de trottoir, et tous les aspects anachroniques des choses et des êtres”. Roger Allard, untitled, in: *SIC*, 37/38/39, Jan./Feb. 1919, 282.

¹¹ “Il créa comme il créa les autres, une mouvement culinaire dans le monde des lettres”. Roch Grey, “Sur la tombe du Poète”, in: *SIC*, 37/38/39, Jan./Feb. 1919, 292.

The features of modernity proliferated dramatically in the decade after Apollinaire's death, when café life, radio, cinema, aviation, and other features of modernity galvanized artists as participant-observers in “l'esprit nouveau”. Apollinaire's title was shrewdly adopted by Le Corbusier as the title of his postwar journal. Mesmerized by steel and glass architecture, sports, dancing and jazz, writers and artists deployed references to such phenomena as entitling insignia, at once signatures and proclamations, cultivating a veritable *lingua franca* for the international avant-garde as its members aspired to overcome the nationalist prejudices of the recent war (even as they embraced renascent nationalism, especially in Eastern Europe). As for Apollinaire, he had made his own position clear before the war when he declared that a modern style existed, not in architectural façades and furniture but in steel construction, machines, automobiles, bicycles and airplanes.¹²

The name Apollinaire, as Pansaers' reference to a movement suggests, became a synecdoche for modernism – modern *isms* – in general, even before the war. Alfred Stieglitz, seeing a friend off from New York to Paris in 1914, advised “That the ‘Soirées de Paris’ crowd must be interesting goes without saying”.¹³ By that point, Apollinaire had emerged in artistic circles as the public face of cubism – both as publicist, and as friend and confidante of the artists themselves. With Picasso and Derain, he had been among the early exponents of primitivism. He was briefly associated with futurism through his publication of “L'Antitradition futuriste” in the Florentine journal *Lacerba*. He had ties with Herwarth Walden's expressionist journal *Der Sturm*, and accompanied Delaunay to Berlin in a promotional tour of orphism. As editor of several journals, most notably *Les Soirées de Paris*, he was a shrewd advocate of the avant-garde. A singular feature of Apollinaire's outlook was his eclectic embrace of rival tendencies, which mirrored his passion for the whole range of modern *divertissements*. He noted with fascinated approval the rise of modern sports; he was an early enthusiast of cinema; and had he lived a bit longer, it's easy to imagine Apollinaire responding with enthusiasm to jazz. After all, when he published *Alcools* the world didn't yet have the word “cocktail”, which would've been a good title.¹⁴

¹² “le style moderne existe, mais ce qui caractérise le style d'aujourd'hui on le remarquerait moins dans les façades des maisons ou dans les meubles que dans les constructions de fer, les machines, les automobiles, les bicyclettes, les aéroplanes”. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, II, ed. Pierre Caizerques and Michel Decaudin, Paris 1991, 466-7.

¹³ Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde*, 48.

¹⁴ “Si on accepte les Jazz-Band” – Jean Cocteau was quoted saying in *Dada Almanach* in 1920 – “il faut accueillir aussi une littérature que l'esprit goute comme un cocktail”. See

He was cosmopolitan, yet also distinctly nationalistic – an embodiment of contradictory tendencies in this as in so much else. Look at the pear-shaped head in Picasso's caricatures and you see a glad-handing rascal, a reminder that Apollinaire was equally at home in the atelier and the press-room, the hushed atmosphere of the rare manuscript chamber and the hush-hush clientele of the pornographer's trade. But his dalliance with smut was really pre-modern, Rabelaisian, a spirit reflected most vividly in his stories and in the unbridled exuberance of *Le poète assassiné*. Fastidious man of letters and scholar, but also hack journalist, he was above all an opportunist of the public sphere. He chronicled avant-garde art for the newspapers, while at the same time running a gossip column. He donned the pseudonym Louise Laland so he could weigh in on fashion (he knew he was following the precedent of Mallarmé, who filled the columns of his own fashion magazine, *La Dernière mode*, with cross-dressing pseudonyms). His most notorious public profile was unintended, when he became a front-page scandal on being arrested as a suspect in the theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre.

As this helplessly expansive review of Apollinaire's involvements indicates, he could well have served as a model of the modern vanguard entrepreneur and jack-of-all-trades even if he had not been a poet. When he notoriously removed the punctuation from his collection of poetry, *Alcools*, it was a mesmerizing gesture that struck many as a stunt. His various literary productions were regarded as symptoms rather than masterpieces – albeit symptoms of a welcome disease. In their symptomatic role, Apollinaire's works were received in the light of a salutary superficiality.¹⁵ What I mean to suggest by this characterization is that Apollinaire incited *opportunism* on many fronts. His own heterogeneous pursuits were far from doctrinaire; he was in that respect the true successor to Walt Whitman's disarming admission, "Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then, I contradict myself".¹⁶ Even in the rarified medium of verse, as Walter Benjamin

"Kritiken aus allen Zeitungen der Welt", in: *Dada Almanach*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck, Berlin 1920, 43. The cocktail hit Paris in tandem with jazz, creating a lasting mutual imprint: even at the end of the decade Félicien Champsaur could introduce his play *Le Jazz des Masques* "comme un cocktail nouveau" (Paris 1928, 30).

¹⁵ The bear hug of modernolatry was itself quickly – and prematurely – dated, particularly in the Anglo-American milieu, in which *The Waste Land* was tolerated for its sheer impact, and Auden's early topical references were put up with only insofar as they were encased in fastidious versification. The prevailing attitude was archly expressed by one critic after the Second World War, when he expressed solidarity with the reader weary of "too many signs of smart modernity and of the sophisticated, urban jauntiness which invaded poetry about 1910". C. M. Bowra, *The Creative Experiment*, London 1949, 62.

¹⁶ Walt Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, New York 1982, 246.

memorably put it, Apollinaire was simultaneously prophet and charlatan.¹⁷ In the milieu of the avant-garde, where ism followed ism like cars on a freight train, Apollinaire’s heterogeneous alliances and temperamental inconsistencies were an incentive to creative variety. He was the living paradigm of a cultural hobo.

It’s hardly surprising, then, to find Apollinaire featured first and foremost among the isms in Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s 1931 book *Ismos*. Ramón – himself dubbed “the Spanish Apollinaire” by Robert Delaunay¹⁸ – honored the poet who “influenced the entire destiny of contemporary art” with the appellation *Apollinairismo*.¹⁹ Guillermo de Torre would follow suit in his *Historia de las Literaturas de Vanguardia*, emphasizing the “polymorphism” of his work.²⁰ This polymorphism reflects a distinctly multi-temporal allegiance. Henri Meschonnic, in *Modernité modernité*, debunks the myth of modernity as incessant pursuit of the new. Instead, he finds in modernism the “abolition of an opposition between the ancient and the new”²¹; and it’s not surprising that only Baudelaire figures more prominently in Meschonnic’s book than Apollinaire. Like Baudelaire, whose famous definition of modernity blended antiquity with the passing moment in equal measure, Apollinaire saw himself as a veritable hotwire to the past: “En moi-même je vois tout le passé grandir”, he wrote in “Cortège”.²²

As a hinge figure linking future to past on the singularly distended globe of the present, Apollinaire was bound to be the subject of posthumous wrangling. As if anticipating this moment, the poet’s line from “Les Fiançailles” fits the case: “Tous les mots que j’avais à dire se sont changés en étoiles”.²³ His legacy was the prize in that Parisian disputation of 1924 when competing claimants to Apollinaire’s neologism took up “surrealism” as a logo and battle cry at once. Yvan Goll, a polyglot European

¹⁷ “Um seine Dichterstimme rangen sein Lebtage ein Prophet und ein Charlatan”. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 177.

¹⁸ Juan Manuel Bonet, “Notes for a Reading of Ramón’s -isms”, in: *Los Ismos de Ramón Gómez de la Serna*, Madrid 2002, 461.

¹⁹ Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *Ismos*, 2nd ed., Buenos Aires 1947, 86.

²⁰ Guillermo de Torre, *Historia de las Literaturas de Vanguardia*, Madrid 1965, 266.

²¹ Henri Meschonnic, *Modernité modernité*, Paris 1988, 76. Reflecting on the role of primitivism for diverse constituencies of modernism, Meschonnic insists: “Par là se montre que la modernité n’est pas le nouveau, n’est pas la rupture. Mais l’abolition de l’opposition entre l’ancien et le nouveau” (emphasis in original).

²² “I see the whole past growing in myself”. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Alcools: Poems 1898-1913* tr. William Meredith, Garden City, NY 1964, 74-5.

²³ “The words I’ve had to say are changed to stars”. Apollinaire, *Alcools: Poems 1898-1913*, 192-3.

mongrel cut from the same cloth as Apollinaire, launched his journal *Surréalisme* at the very moment André Breton felt sufficiently emboldened in his farewell to dada to publish the “Manifesto of Surrealism” – a document considerably longer than the entire contents of Goll’s journal. Goll had previously protested the effacement of Apollinaire’s legacy by the dadaists, claiming that the term best reflected the pre-war poetic embrace of music-hall and popular entertainments, and of modernity in general. In October, in the first (and only) issue of his journal, Goll elaborated his view that “Surrealism is a vast movement of the age”, embodying a healthy response to modernity in contrast to “some ex-dadas still intent on taunting the bourgeoisie”.²⁴ In December, Breton launched his own journal, *La Révolution surréaliste*, in response to which Goll could only complain that what he wanted was “un ‘Évolution Surréaliste’”, not a surrealist revolution.²⁵ Once launched, surrealism (like most movements) lost touch with the enlivening irreverence of Apollinaire – who, Breton had observed before the poet’s death, “holds the key to a modern gaiety”.²⁶

An insouciant gaiety is wonderfully concentrated in the Czech movement, poetism. Its founder, Karel Teige, later observed that the concurrent rise of surrealism was indebted primarily to dada, while poetism perpetuated the *esprit nouveau* of Apollinaire²⁷ – validating, in effect, Goll’s instincts, while happily forfeiting the poet’s neologism from *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. “In its blossoming you will discover the intoxicating aroma of life”, Teige proclaimed with gustatory animation in the manifesto of poetism, which in order to be “*an art of living and enjoying*, it must become, eventually, a natural part of everyday life, as delightful and accessible as sport, love, wine, and all manner of other delectations”.²⁸ This avowedly “modern Epicureanism” feasts on the culinary precedence of Apollinaire,

²⁴ “Le surréalisme est un vast mouvement de l’époque. Il signifie la santé [...] Et cette contrefaçon du surréalisme, que quelques ex-dadas ont inventée pour continuer à épater les bourgeois, sera vite mise hors de la circulation”. Yvan Goll, “Manifeste du surréalisme”, in : *Surréalisme*, 1, Oct. 1924 – Jean-Michel Place edition, 2004, ix.

²⁵ Jean Bertho, “Autor de la revue Surréalisme”, in : *Surréalisme*, 1, 37.

²⁶ André Breton, *The Lost Steps*, tr. Mark Polizzotti, Lincoln 1996, 25.

²⁷ Karel Šrp, “Teige During the Thirties: Projecting Dialectics”, tr. Karolina Vocablo, in: Erich Dluhosch & Rostislav Svácha (eds.), *Karel Teige/1900-1951: L’Enfant Terrible of the Czech Modernist Avant-Garde*, Cambridge, Mass. 1999, 262. Teige published a lengthy homage, “Guillaume Apollinaire a jeho doba” (Apollinaire and his time), in: *ReD* 2 (1928-29), 78-98.

²⁸ Karel Teige, “Poetism”, tr. Alexandra Büchler, in: Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1900-1930*, Cambridge, Mass. 2002, 579.

whose appetites seem directly summoned in the enumeration of poetism’s features: “nonchalant, exuberant, fantastic, playful, nonheroic, and erotic”; “a poetry of Sunday afternoons, picnics, luminous cafes, intoxicating cocktails, lively boulevards, spa promenades, but also the poetry of silence, night, quiet, and peace”.²⁹ Conceiving poetism as a language of heraldry in the spirit of Apollinaire’s calligrammes, Teige took it as axiomatic that “A poem is to be read like a modern picture. A modern picture is to be read like a poem”.³⁰ It’s the seesaw oscillation – now this, now that – in which the legacy of Apollinaire is most keenly manifested; a recognition that single-minded concentration no longer works when confronting the profusion of modernity. Multi-tasking is the gift not of Apollo but of Apollinaire, patron saint of poetism, “the art of wasting time”.³¹ Out of distraction, that fathomless potion so mesmerizing to Walter Benjamin, the new arts would emerge: not only cinema, in the roll call of poetism, but also “avionics, radio, technical, optical, and auditory inventions (opto-phonetics), sport, dance, circus and music hall, places of perpetual improvisations where new inventions are made every day”.³²

Such distractions also provided new venues for dialogue, polylogue, social animation of the sort pioneered by Apollinaire’s “poème-conversations où le poète au centre de la vie enregistre en quelque sorte de lyrisme ambiant”.³³ Poetism, Teige insisted, was not an *ism* but “an art of life”, a species of *modernolatria* for which such appellations as surrealism and constructivism were misguided.³⁴ An Apollinaire movement, such as it

²⁹ Teige, “Poetism”, 580, 582.

³⁰ Teige, “Painting and Poetry”, in: Benson & Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds*, 368.

³¹ Teige, “Poetism”, 580.

³² Teige, “Poetism”, 581.

³³ Guillaume Apollinaire, “Simultanisme-Librettisme”, in: *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, II, 976. The “poem-conversations where the poet registers, in the midst of living, some sort of lyrical ambiance” were as extensively practiced by Blaise Cendrars and Pierre Albert-Birot. In the essay from *Les Soirées de Paris* from which this is cited, Apollinaire took issue with the increasingly grandiose claims of his hitherto mentor, Henri-Martin Barzun, whose pioneering polyphonic verse also had an impact on Ezra Pound. For more, see Jed Rasula, *Modernism and Poetic Inspiration: The Shadow Mouth*, New York 2009, 69-73.

³⁴ Teige, “Poetism”, 579. The precedent, and pressure, of constructivism was such that Teige took care to acknowledge it as the functional basis of poetism even as he relegated it to the avant-gardist propensity to consolidate itself in terms of factionalist isms, a tendency poetism hoped to surmount. Apart from the Prague poetism, the constructivist orientation – to use art in order to overcome art – was inimical to the spirit of Apollinaire, for whom art was an exalted mission surpassing the local expedience of politics. And here we come to the most precarious aspect of his legacy, for the affirmation of new themes predicated on the infrastructural details of modernity, from café life to radio and airplanes, could not help being compromised by what we would now call corporate sponsorship. TSF, that utopian acronym meaning telegraphy without wires (a.k.a. radio), would prove to be contingent on

was, is mostly recognizable not in any of the *isms* but in certain eclectic champions of modernity, some of whom have been marginalized by their singularity – which is to say, the non-programmatic gusto with which their curiosity, appetite, and exuberance manifested itself. This tribe includes Karel Teige, Ramón Gómez de la Serna (the “Spanish Apollinaire” mentioned earlier), Yvan Goll of course, and Jean Epstein, Polish born Parisian film pioneer, whose 1921 book *La poésie d’aujourd’hui* is as important as (and more comprehensive than) Apollinaire’s essay “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes”. (The more esoteric traces of his legacy are evident in Epstein’s next book, *Lyrosophie*, with its Kabbalistic ruminations.) “The cinema is poetry’s most powerful medium, the truest medium for the untrue, the unreal, the ‘surreal’ as Apollinaire would have said”, wrote Epstein. “This is why some of us have entrusted to it our highest hopes”.³⁵

Another figure claimed by various movements but independent of them all was Marcel Duchamp, who was exasperated by Apollinaire’s catholicity: “One was torn between a sort of anguish and an insane laughter”, he recalled, characterizing Apollinaire as “a butterfly. He would be talking to you about cubism, then the next day he was reading aloud from Victor Hugo in a salon”. In the end, Duchamp had to admit that “Apollinaire had guts, he saw things”, and never hesitated to say what he saw.³⁶ Duchamp’s exasperation was expressed in a more tempered way by Jorge Luis Borges, whose youthful alliance with the ultraists in Madrid surely influenced his suspicion of modernist regalia opportunistically deployed as lyric vitamin supplements. Reflecting back in 1946, Borges found that “the general value of Apollinaire’s work is more documentary than aesthetic. We visit it to recover the flavor of the ‘modern’ poetry of the first decades of our century. Not a single line allows us to forget the

commercial interests (as in the United States) or under direct control of the state (as in Germany and Great Britain). Automobiles and airplanes were not free spirited artifactual manifestations of the avant-garde, but industrial products manufactured by Volkswagen and Ford and Boeing, companies advantageously organized to support the next war effort. In the end, the gregarious legacy of “le mouvement Apollinaire” serves as a rueful reminder of how improbable it is that the life of art could amount to more than a parasitic reflection of forces quite indifferent to the artistic imagination.

³⁵ Jean Epstein, “On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie”, in: *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology 1907-1939*, Vol. 1, ed. Richard Abel, Princeton 1988, 318.

³⁶ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, tr. Ron Padgett, New York 1971, 24, 38. Duchamp’s perplexity is discernible in his 1916 readymade based on a Sapolin Enamel ad, altered to read APOLINÈRE ENAMELED, depicting a *jeune fille* painting a bed. Dick Adelaar and Michiel Roding suggest this homage escalates the poet’s name to that of the epoch (“ère = Jahrhundert”). See their “Erläuterungen zu den ausgestellten Werken”, in: *Apollinaire: Wortführer der Avantgarde, Avantgardist des Wortes*, Amsterdam 1999, 112.

date on which it was written”.³⁷ The contrasting examples of undatable poets – Valéry, Rilke, Yeats – make Borges’ case without further ado, even if we would now be more inclined to read the historical symptoms of an ahistorical surface in their work. More to the point here is the insight to which Borges’ suspicion of modernolatry gives rise. “Although he lived his days among the *baladins* of cubism and futurism, he was not a modern man. He was somewhat less complex and more happy, more ancient, and stronger”, Borges observes of Apollinaire – adding in a parenthesis: “He was so unmodern that modernity seemed picturesque, and perhaps even moving, to him”.³⁸ This offers a valuable clue about the very condition of modernity famously evoked by Marx (all that is solid melts into air), validating the commemoration of effluvia for art even while conceding its inevitable descent into esoterica. Unlike Yeats’ fantasies of Byzantium, Apollinaire’s Paris wears its date on its sleeve: but despite Borges’ suspicion of the modern, these dates keep tumbling out of incommensurable centuries. “Zone” compresses its modernism into a medieval penumbra; the dandy of the boulevards may suddenly loom up in a monk’s cowl.

Like a butterfly, Apollinaire was in perpetual motion: *that* was the real allure of “le mouvement Apollinaire”, the sense of which is nicely spelled out by Gertrude Stein in *Lectures in America*: “if it were possible that a movement were lively enough it would exist so completely that it would not be necessary to see it moving against anything to know that it is moving. This is what we mean by life”.³⁹ The life Apollinaire bequeathed to the avant-garde was a movement of precisely this sort. Curiosity and taste – unconstrained by categorical precedent – coupled with enthusiasm, following the course of an opportunistic eclecticism through the ever-expanding channels of polymorphic creativity: such was the prompting of “le mouvement Apollinaire” felt by Pansaers and so many others after the Great War.

³⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Paradox of Apollinaire”, tr. Suzanne Jill Levine, in: *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, New York 1999, 312.

³⁸ Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, 313.

³⁹ Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America*, New York 1935, 170.

Okkultismus, Esoterik, Mystik und die Ikonographie des Unsichtbaren in der frühen mitteleuropäischen Avantgarde. Das Beispiel der Posener Gruppe Bunt und des Bauhausprofessors Lothar Schreyer¹

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Auch wenn die berühmten ersten abstrakten Aquarelle Kandinskys als Auslöser der „Epoche des Großen Geistigen“ gelten, wird die künstlerisch-literarische Avantgarde in der internationalen Forschung meistens als rational, konstruktiv und areligiös dargestellt. Spirituelle und mystische Komponente gehören anscheinend nicht zum vorherrschenden Paradigma der Avantgarde, folgt man der gängigen Avantgardeforschung. In Wirklichkeit bilden sie jedoch einen wichtigen Bestandteil des avantgardistischen Gedankenuniversums, wie sich in Bezug auf das Schaffen unterschiedlicher Gruppierungen, Künstler, Schriftsteller und Theoretiker belegen lässt. Dies gilt sogar für Dada, trotz dessen antitraditionalistischen Rufs – so interessierte sich etwa Hannah Höch, unter dem Einfluß von Thomas Ring, für die Chiromantie. Okkultistische Einflüsse sind in der surrealistischen *écriture automatique* ebenso offensichtlich wie in den fotografischen Experimenten Man Rays. Das Repertoire des Okkulten in der Avantgardekunst und dessen Bezug auf spirituelle und religiöse Doktrinen – wie etwa die Theosophie, die Anthroposophie und weitere okkulte Lehren, die im frühen 20. Jahrhundert integraler Bestandteil des kulturellen Milieus in Europa waren, sind nicht nur im Schaffen großer Namen wie Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Kasimir Malewitsch oder Piet Mondrian, sondern auch im Werk zahlreicher weniger bekannten Künstler zu finden – nicht zuletzt aus Mitteleuropa.

¹ Dieser Beitrag beruht auf Forschung, die durch Unterstützung der ADAMAS Stiftung Götz Hübner für interkulturelle Studien am griechisch-deutschen und polnisch-deutschen Beispiel sowie ein Stipendium des Deutschen Literaturarchivs in Marbach am Neckar ermöglicht wurde.

Vor 1990 wurden die mystisch-religiösen Inhalte im literarischen und bildkünstlerischen Schaffen der Avantgarde kaum angesprochen² und nicht selten – wie in den kommunistischen Staaten – bewußt ausgeklammert gelassen. Erst im letzten Jahrzehnt des vorigen Jahrhunderts sind die Berührungen mit Mystik, Esoterik und Okkultismus in der Avantgarde zu einem wichtigen historiographischen Gegenstand der Forschung geworden³.

Beziehen sich die meisten Veröffentlichungen und Ausstellungen zu diesem Themenkreis sich weitgehend auf westeuropäische Avantgardekunst, so gewinnt allmählich auch das Schaffen mittelosteuropäischer Künstler in diesem Zusammenhang an Interesse⁴.

Der folgende Aufsatz versteht sich in diesem Kontext als Beitrag zur noch weitgehend ausstehenden Historiographie der avantgardistischen Aneignung okkultistischen, esoterischen und spirituellen Gedankenguts und der Verknüpfung von Elementen daraus mit den Hauptanliegen der Avantgarde als Geflecht künstlerisch-literarischer Bewegungen und Gruppierungen mit gesamtgesellschaftlichen Ansprüchen.

In diesem Kontext zählt die Idee des „neuen Menschen“ zu den wichtigsten Ambitionen der Avantgarde. Das Streben nach einem „neuen Menschen“ wird in der vorliegenden Historiographie der Avantgarde meistens in einem rationalistischen Rahmen gedeutet. Im Folgenden gilt es hingegen exemplarisch nachzuzeichnen, wie Vorstellungen des „neuen Menschen“ teilweise aufs Engste mit einer Präokkupation mit Okkultismus, Esoterik und Mystik verbunden waren – dies ist in zwei wichtigen Zusammenhängen der mitteleuropäischen Avantgarde, in der Posener Gruppe Bunt und im Weimarer Bauhaus, der Fall. In der so genannten mystischen Fraktion des Bauhauses spielte insbesondere Lothar Schreyer eine zentrale Rolle, als Künstler, Kunsttheoretiker und später als Chronist.

² Vgl. Wieland Schmied (Hrsg.), *Zeichen des Glaubens. Geist der Avantgarde. Religiöse Tendenzen in der Kunst 20. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1980.

³ Vg. Sixten Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*, Åbo 1970; Sixten Ringbom, „Kunst in der ‚Zeit des Grossen Geistigen‘. Okkulte Elemente in der frühen Theorie der Abstrakten Malerei“, in: Beat Wyss (Hrsg.), *Mythologie der Aufklärung. Geheimlehren der Moderne*, München 1993, 26-72; Linda Darlymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton 1983; Linda Darlymple Henderson, „Die moderne Kunst und das Unsichtbare: Die verborgenen Wellen und Dimensionen des Okkultismus und der Wissenschaften“, in: Hellmut Seemann (Hrsg.), *Okkultismus und Avantgarde. Von Munch bis Mondrian 1900-1915*, Frankfurt 1995, 13-31; Herwig Guratzsch (Hrsg.), *Expressionismus und Wahnsinn*, München-Berlin-London-New York 2003; Christoph Wagner (Hrsg.), *Johannes Itten – Wassily Kandinsky – Paul Klee. Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, Bielefeld 2005.

⁴ Vgl. Andrzej Turowski, *Awangardowe marginesy*, Warszawa 1998; Grzegorz Sztabiński, *Dlaczego geometria?* Łódź 2004.

Den Hintergründen seines Wirkens und den differenzierten Bedeutungen esoterischer Inhalte seiner Werke wurde bisher keine eingehende Studie gewidmet. Eine ähnliche Situation betrifft das Schaffen der polnischen Künstlervereinigung Bunt (Revolte) zwischen 1917 und 1922. In beiden Künstlerkreisen spielt die Ikonographie des Unsichtbaren eine prägnante, bislang aber noch nicht eingehend untersuchte Rolle. Daher verdienen sie eine detailliertere Betrachtung, zu welcher der folgende Beitrag Materialien herantragen will. Dabei möchte die folgende Diskussion die Aufmerksamkeit nicht zuletzt auf lokale Unterschiede, die oft in allgemeinen Darstellungen übergangen werden, richten. In der Forschung findet man meistens nur Hinweise auf die Theosophie und auf Philosophen, die eine transnational übergreifende Wirkung hatten, wie etwa Nietzsche oder Bergson. Vergleicht man jedoch die Traditionsbezüge in der Aneignung okkultistischen, esoterischen und mystischen Gedankenguts in unterschiedlichen nationalen Konstellationen wird hingegen deutlich, dass die Wendung zum Okkulten, Esoterischen und Mystischen in der internationalen Avantgarde häufig durch lokale, teils national bedingte Unterschiede geprägt wurde. Eine vergleichende Analyse der zwei, in ihrer Verwurzelung im Expressionismus verwandten, aber zugleich recht unterschiedlichen Avantgardezusammenhängen der polnischen Gruppe Bunt in Posen und des Bauhauses in Weimar kann die hier angedeuteten Unterschiede auf exemplarische Weise aufdecken.

Einige Grundzüge

Den okkultistischen und esoterischen Komponenten im avantgardistischen Manifest ist ein im Jahr 2007 erschienener Aufsatz gewidmet⁵ und ein Umriss zum Thema Okkultismus erschien vor kurzem in einem Lexikon zur europäischen Avantgarde. Laut der darin enthaltenen Definition umfasst der Okkultismus (abgeleitet vom lateinischen *occultum*: das Geheimnisvolle, Verborgene) „Lehren und Praktiken zur Erklärung von Phänomenen, die den bekannten Naturgesetzen widersprechen, bzw. mit dem Wissen der Naturwissenschaften nicht oder noch nicht erschließbar sind“⁶. Schon zur Zeit der Renaissance gab es Versuche, das esoterische

⁵ Vgl. Benedikt Hjartarson, „Myths of Rupture: The Manifesto and the Concept of ‘Avant-Garde’“, in: Astradur Eysteinnsson & Vivian Liska (Hrsg.), *Modernism*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 2007, 173-94. Hjartarson arbeitet zur Zeit an einer Dissertation zu diesem Thema.

⁶ Inge Münz-Koenen, „Okkultismus“, in: Hubert van den Berg & Walter Fähnders (Hrsg.), *Metzler Lexikon Avantgarde*, Stuttgart-Weimar 2009, 240-1, hier 240. Vgl. auch: Wiebke Amthor, Hans Richard Brittnacher & Anja Hallacker (Hrsg.), *Profane Mystik? Andacht und*

Wissen – Magie, Alchimie, Astrologie und Kabbala – mit Physik, Mathematik und Theologie zu vereinbaren. Im 19. Jahrhundert erfuhren diese Bestrebungen eine Neubelebung. Dabei verknüpfte sich das wiederbelebte Interesse an Okkultismus, Esoterik und Mystik im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert mit wissenschaftlichen und pseudowissenschaftlichen Reflexionen zu derzeitigen wissenschaftlichen Entdeckungen wie Röntgenstrahlung, Hertz' Wellen und Radioaktivität, die mit „Astralvisionen“, Spiritismus, Parapsychologie und Theosophie in Zusammenhang gesetzt wurden. Die hier beschriebene „Renaissance des Okkulten“ im 19. Jahrhundert hat auch Spuren – sowohl auf programmatischer, literarischer wie bildkünstlerischer Ebene – im Schaffen der Avantgarde hinterlassen – ob es sich dabei nun um Geisterphotos oder Photos von Tischlevitationen, um die Programmatik des Rayonismus von Michail Larionow oder den Orphismus Robert Delaunays, um die Aneignung der Vorstellung von einem „kosmischen Bewusstsein“ und der „vierten Dimension“ bei Pëtr Uspenskij oder um die von einer nichteuklidischen Geometrie inspirierte Tendenz im fazettierten, kristallinen Werk kubistischer und futuristischer Provenienz oder den suprematistischen Visionen eines Kasimir Malewitsch handelt.

Der Weg avantgardistischer Künstler zur Abstraktion und zum Absoluten ist kaum denkbar ohne die Aneignung spiritueller Traditionen, seien diese nun abendländischen, orientalischen, chassidischen oder fernöstlichen Ursprungs. Zur Standardlektüre vieler Avantgardisten zählten *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* Kandinskys, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* Rudolf Steiners sowie Henri Bergsons *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, das Elemente seiner vitalistischen Philosophie mit okkultistischem Gedankengut verbindet. Eine Hauptinspiration war die magisch bedingte „primitive“ Kunst, die häufig an kultische Vorstellungen und okkultistische Denkmuster gebunden war.

Spirituelle Inspirationen dienten häufig als theoretische und (pseudo)wissenschaftliche Grundlage für ästhetische Phantasien. Dem dominierenden rationalen Weltbild der Moderne wurden alternative, spirituelle Konzepte gegenübergestellt. Auch bot der okkultistische und esoterische Bezug eine Grundlage zur Überschreitung tradierter Grenzen des konventionellen Sprachgebrauchs, wie etwa in Hugo Balls Reflexionen zur „Alchimie des Wortes“, Notizen Hannah Höchs und Lothar Schreyers,

Extase in Literatur und Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 2002; Priska Pytlik, *Okkultismus und Moderne. Ein kulturhistorisches Phänomen und seine Bedeutung für die Literatur um 1900*, Paderborn 2005; Bernd Stiegler, *Bilder der Photographie. Ein Album photographischer Metaphern*, Frankfurt am Main 2006; Thomas Macho & Annette Wunschel (Hrsg.), *Science & Fiction: Über Gedankenexperimente in Wissenschaft, Philosophie und Literatur*, Frankfurt am Main 2004.

den biblisch inspirierten zweisprachigen Manifesten Stanislaw Kubickis und den Werken des tschechischen Poetismus. Dabei wird das Anliegen der Avantgarde, eine Erneuerung der Menschheit und ein radikaler Neuanfang der Gesellschaft (häufig mit der Idee einer Weltrevolution verbunden) oft als mystische Geburt und Entwurf eines „neuen Menschen“ visualisiert. Die esoterische Komponente zeigt sich dabei im Großen und Ganzen auf zweierlei Weise in der bildenden Kunst der Avantgarde. Erstens – und dies bezieht sich vor allem auf die frühavantgardistische, teilweise noch im Jugendstil wurzelnde Kunst – geschah dies in Form figürlicher Symbolik, kosmischer Requisite und narrativer Titel. Zweitens realisiert sich die spezifische Ikonographie des Unsichtbaren⁷, die hier gemeint ist, in einer nicht-figürlichen, geometrischen wie organischen, abstrakten Kunst.

Die erste Tendenz zeigt sich in der Verwendung sakraler Motive, wie etwa des Kreuzes, zur Andeutung des Transzendenten. Die christliche – oder, im breiteren Sinne, gesamte religiöse und mystische – Ikonographie ist sowohl Relikt wie Refugium. Sie ist etwa in Werken von Fidus (z.B. *Lichtgebet*, 1913), der Künstler der *Brücke* und der polnischen Künstler Franciszek Siedlecki und Boleslaw Biegas (z.B. *Palais de Lumière*, 1925) anzutreffen. Dabei dienen biblische Motive nicht selten dem Ausdruck von Pazifismus, Anarchismus und revolutionären Anliegen⁸. Teilweise setzt sich diese Tendenz in der folgenden Phase der Avantgarde durch, sei es in stilistisch modifizierter Form, z.B. im Konstruktivismus.

Die zweite Tendenz manifestiert sich als Hinwendung zur Abstraktion. Sie ist zum einen in frühen Entwürfen von Kasimir Malewitsch (z.B. *Triumph des Himmels*, 1907) oder vom litauisch-polnischen Musiker und Maler Konstantinas Ciurlionis (z.B. *Blumen*, ca. 1906-1907) zu finden, die musikalischen Etüden gleichen und die Idee des inneren Klangs von Kandinsky vorwegnehmen. Farbe und Licht, sowie der gezielte Umgang mit Transparenz und zahlreiche Bezüge auf eine nichteuklidische Raumauffassung und die Relativitätstheorie, dienen dem bildlichen Ausdruck

⁷ Der Begriff „Ikonographie des Unsichtbaren“ wird hier in Anlehnung an Beat Wyss' Terminus „Ikonologie des Insichtbaren“ verwendet, vgl. Beat Wyss (Hrsg.), *Mythologie der Aufklärung. Geheimlehren der Moderne*, München 1993, 10.

⁸ Vgl. Lidia Gluchowska, *Avantgarde und Liebe. Margarete und Stanislaw Kubicki 1910-1945*. Berlin 2007, 213-22.



Fig. 25: Stanisław Kubicki, *Ekstase*, Öl auf Leinwand, 1919.
Besitz: Berlinische Galerie, Foto: Privatsammlung Berlin.

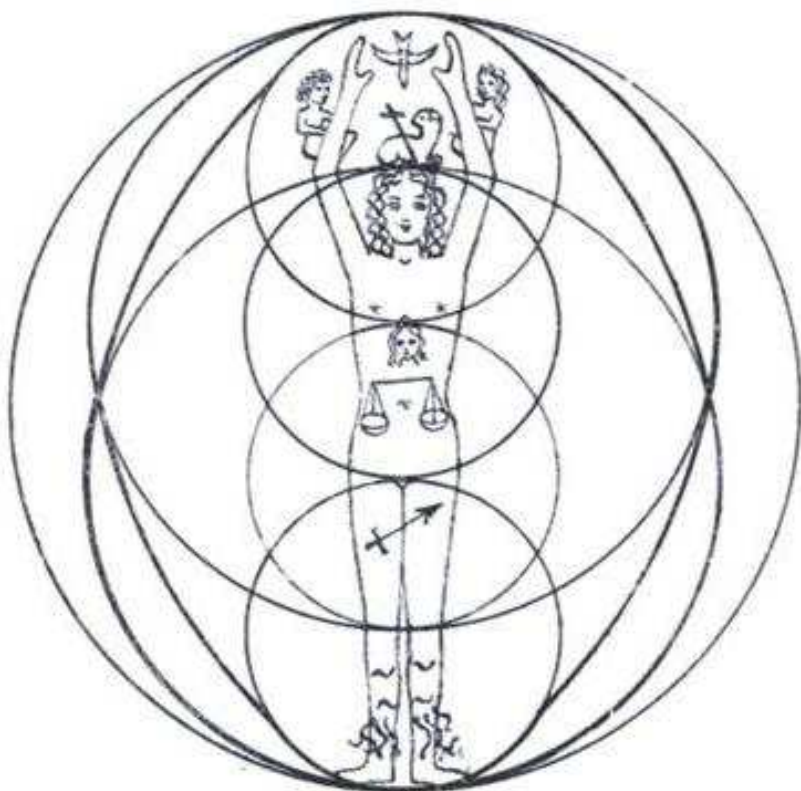


Fig. 26: Lothar Schreyer, *Himmlich-kosmischer Mensch*. Vervielfältigte Zeichnung. Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach/Neckar, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 14.

einer Synthese von Philosophie, Religion und Wissenschaft⁹. Dieselben Elemente findet man (teilweise in anderer Form) im Oeuvre italienischer Futuristen wie Umberto Boccioni sowie im sogenannten zweiten deutschen Expressionismus der frühen 20er Jahre.

Als einer der wesentlichen strukturellen Hinweise auf die Transzendenz in der bildenden Kunst der klassischen Avantgarde gilt die Geometrie. In Anlehnung an die Theorien von Pythagoras und seiner Nachfolger gelten ein Gleichgewicht von Vertikalem und Horizontalem oder auch

⁹ Vgl. Gluchowska, *Avantgarde und Liebe*, 233-56.

bestimmte Zahlkombinationen als Repräsentation des Absoluten. Beispiele sind hier die so genannten 'pythagoräischen Figurationen' von Stanislaw Kubicki¹⁰ (Fig. 25) und Sandor Bortnyik, entstanden in der ersten Hälfte der 20er Jahre. Auf ähnliche Weise wird die Geometrie um 1924 in Lothar Schreyers Zeichnung *Himmlich-kosmischer Mensch* (Fig. 26) funktionalisiert, in welcher die Titelfigur des zugehörigen Aufsatzes eingeordnet in einem Netz von einander überschneidender Kreisen gezeigt wird und an den *Vitruvianischen Menschen* Leonardo da Vincis erinnert. Der „kosmische Mensch“ als Repräsentation der avantgardistisch-utopischen Figur eines vergeistigten „neuen Menschen“ wird von Schreyer mehrmals bildkünstlerisch wie theoretisch aufgegriffen, wie später zu diskutieren sein wird.

Die Posener Gruppe Bunt

Das heterogene Programm der expressionistischen Gruppe Bunt in Polen kristallisierte sich, ähnlich wie das der Łódźer Künstlergruppe Jung Idysz (Jung Jiddisch, 1919-1923), unter dem Einfluß des deutschen Expressionismus aus. Die Arbeit der beiden Gruppen wurde aber zugleich von anderen Traditionen geprägt. Im Fall von Jung Idysz spielten auch die jüdische Renaissance des 19. Jahrhunderts und der Bezug zum jüdischen Mystizismus eine bedeutende Rolle. Charakteristisch für diese Orientierung sind Werke wie das Ölgemälde *Segnung des Baal Schem Tow* von Jankel Adler¹¹ und Moses Brodersons Linolschnitt *Tänzende Teufel* (beide um 1919). Bei Bunt gibt es andere Traditionsbezüge.

Der Kreis der Posener Expressionisten, welche sich um die von Jerzy Hulewicz herausgegebene Kunstzeitschrift *Zdrój* (Quelle, 1917-1922) gruppierte, wird in der lokalen Kunst- und Literaturwissenschaft oft als Oase des Mystizismus bezeichnet, eine genauere Beschreibung der mystizistischen Bezüge fehlt jedoch in der Regel. Drei wichtige Elemente lassen sich unterscheiden.

Eine erste Orientierung bildete die polnische Romantik¹². In *Zdrój* erschienen zahlreiche literarische und programmatische Beiträge, die an

¹⁰ Gluchowska, *Avantgarde und Liebe*, 237.

¹¹ Vgl. Lidia Gluchowska, „Avantgarde. Poznań – Berlin“, in: Robert Traba (Hrsg.), *My, Berlińczycy/ Wir Berliner. Geschichte einer deutsch-polnischen Nachbarschaft*, Leipzig 2009, 160-95, hier 170.

¹² Vgl. Grażyna Halasa & Agnieszka Salamon (Hrsg.), *Bunt. Ekspresjonizm Poznański 1917-1925*, Poznań 2003; Jerzy Malinowski, *Sztuka i nowa wspólnota. Zrzeszenie artystów Bunt 1917-1922*, Wrocław 1991, 95; Jerzy Malinowski, *Grupa „Jung Idysz” i żydowskie środowisko „nowej*

das Werk polnischer Romantiker, wie etwa des Nationaldichters Adam Mickiewicz und Juliusz Slowacki, anknüpften, und somit auch einen Bezug zum Mystizismus und zur Mythologie des so genannten polnischen Messianismus herstellten (dieser Messianismus war von der Idee geprägt, das seit dem 18. Jahrhundert besetzte und beteilte Polen sei als Christus der Nationen zu verstehen). Spuren dieser Grundidee der polnischen Romantik zeigen sich in zahlreichen Beiträgen von Jerzy Hulewicz und insbesondere in einem in *Zdrój* in Fragmenten veröffentlichten Roman *Opowieści Rybalt*a (Erzählungen eines fahrenden Sängers) von Wacław Berent. Es ist wohl kein Zufall, dass Berent Übersetzer von Werken Nietzsches ins Polnische und Autor des Buches *Źródła i ujścia Nietzszecjanizmu* (Quellen und Mündungen des Nietzscheanismus, 1906) war. Hier wird auch seine ebenfalls im Roman offensichtliche Faszination für das Dionysische sichtbar, wobei Christus – im Sinne des unter den Avantgarde-Künstlern verbreiteten religiösen Synkretismus – mit Dionysos identifiziert wird. Im bildkünstlerischen Werk der Bunt-Künstler mischt sich christliche Ikonographie – ganz unkanonisch und profan – mit Nacktheit und orgiastischen Darstellungen, wie etwa die Linolschnitten *Salome* von Jerzy Hulewicz (1918) und *Tanż der Salome* (1919) von Stefan Szmań zeigen¹³.

Neben der polnischen Romantik bildete das Werk einiger zeitgenössischer polnischer Autoren eine wichtige Vorgabe. So arbeitete Hulewicz als Redakteur und Schriftsteller eng mit Literaten zusammen, die sich in ihren Werken intensiv mit okkultem Gedankengut auseinandersetzten. Zu diesen Autoren zählte an erster Stelle Stanisław Przybyszewski, in Berlin der Jahrhundertwende als „der geniale Pole“ berühmt, der als erster konsequenter Fürsprecher der Kunst Edvard Munchs auftrat und als „König des Lebens“ eine graue Eminenz der Berliner Bohemetaverne Zum schwarzen Ferkel war. In Przybyszewskis Schriften mischten sich Anarchismus, Satanismus und Mystizismus, am deutlichsten wohl in seiner Trilogie *Homo Sapiens* (1895-1896)¹⁴. Lange nach seiner Berliner Pe-

sztuki“ w Polsce w latach 1918-1923, Warszawa 1987; Lidia Gluchowska & Hubert van den Berg, „Jiddische Avantgarde“, in: van den Berg & Fähnders (Hrsg.), *Metzler Lexikon Avantgarde*, 162-4; und Heinrich Olschowsky, „Polen“ „“, in: van den Berg & Fähnders (Hrsg.), *Metzler Lexikon Avantgarde*, 252-6.

¹³ Vgl. Kazimierz Piotrowski, „Irreligia Buntu. Geneza i morfologia poznańskiej apostazji“, in: Grażyna Halasa & Agnieszka Salamon (Hrsg.), *Bunt. Ekspresjonizm Poznański 1917-1925*, Poznań 2003, 119-38, hier 122-5.

¹⁴ Vgl. Lidia Gluchowska, „Totenmesse, Lebensfries und Die Hölle. Przybyszewski, Munch, Vigeland und die protoexpressionistische Kunsttheorie“, in: *Recherches Germaniques*, 2009 (im Druck).

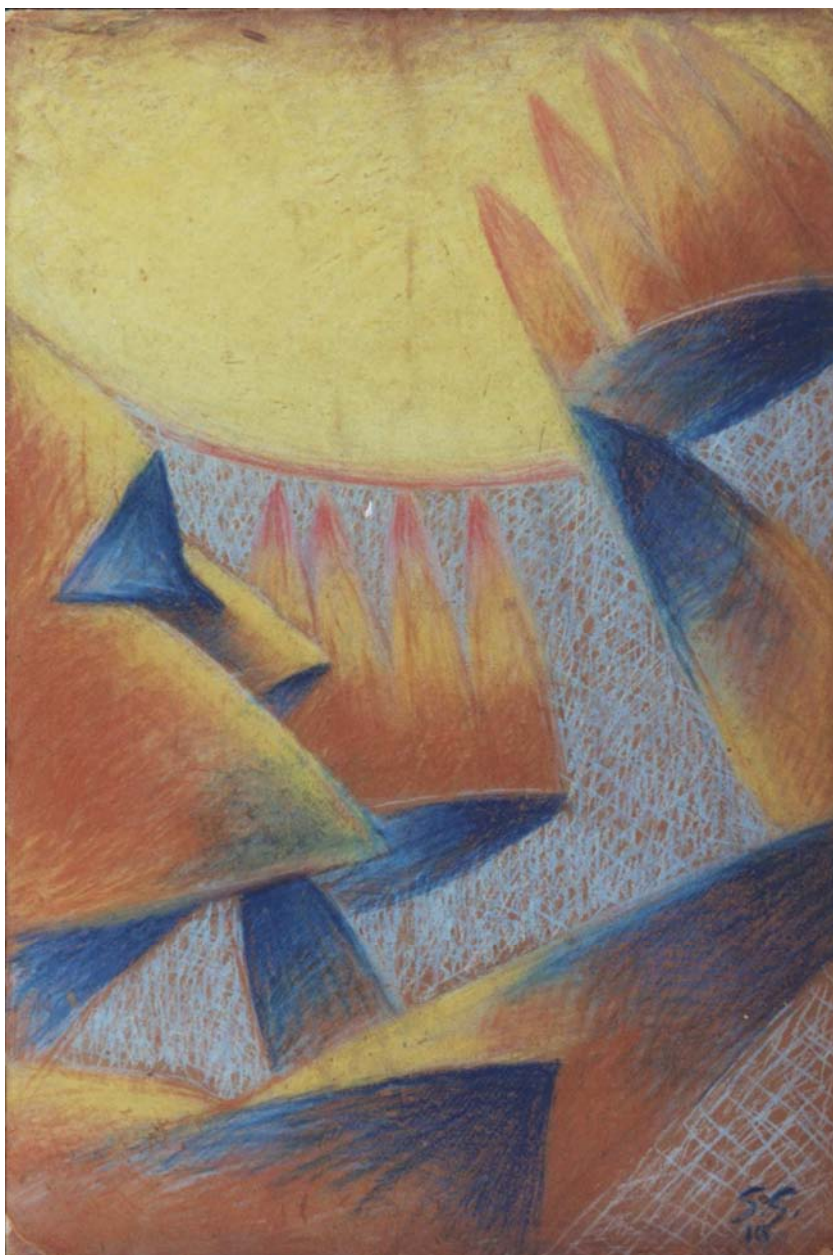


Fig. 27: Stefan Szmaj, *Sonnenanbeter*, um 1921. Pastell.
Besitz und Foto: Privatsammlung Berlin.



Fig. 28: Margarete Kubicka, *Hommage à Kubicki: Kubicki und die Welten*.
Besitz und Foto: Privatsammlung Berlin.

riode prägte er die ersten Programme der Posener Expressionisten auf wesentliche Art. In seinem Roman *Synagoge Satans* (Berlin 1897; 1903 auf

Polnisch als *Synagoga Szatana* erschienen) pries er die von der katholischen Kirche tabuisierte Erotik und Sexualität, wobei er den Geschlechtsakt im Rhythmus der Natur als Ausdruck der Ganzheit des Daseins deutete. Damit verhöhnnte er eindeutig die institutionalisierte Moral, ganz im Sinne des *épater le bourgeois* der Bohème, ähnlich wie Władysław Skotarek es später in *Ofiarowanie* (Opferung; Holzplastik und Zeichnung, ca. 1921) tat. Auf den ersten Blick zeigt das Bild einen Gekreuzigten – bei genauerem Hinsehen jedoch ein Liebespaar¹⁵. Das Schaffen eines anderen im Bunt-Kreis einflußreichen Schriftstellers, Tadeusz Miciński, wurde vor allem von östlicher Religiosität und Spiritualität inspiriert. In seinem Werk kombinierte er diese Spiritualität mit der heraklitischen Konzeption des ewigen Stroms, die wiederum mit Henri Bergsons Konzeption eines *‘élan vital’* verwandt war¹⁶. Micińskis Ideen überschneideten sich mit Ansichten des Bildhauers der Gruppe Bunt, August Zamoyski, der sich auf die indische Konzeption der *Sansara* (Samskāra) bezog, die Vorstellung einer Wanderung der Seele, die sich der Erfüllung und Befreiung entgegen bewegt. Diese Vorstellung kommt u.a. in seinen Werken *Sansara* und *Ich dwoje* (Sie sind zwei), beide 1917, zum Tragen, in denen die dynamischen, hochstrebenden, ineinanderfließenden menschlichen Gestalten einer Flamme ähneln. Parallel dazu entstand auch eine Erzählung von Hulewicz, „Samskāra“ (1918), und dessen heute verschollenes Gemälde mit demselben Titel, sowie ein 1919 in *Zdrój* erschienener Linolschnitt. Die darin enthaltene Botschaft entsprang den theosophischen und anthroposophischen Lehren von Édouard Schuré, Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant und Rudolf Steiner, welche ebenfalls als Inspiration der abstrakten Bildsprache anderer Avantgardekünstler gelten, darunter Ciurlanis, Kandinskys, Mondrians und Malewitsch.

Die Ansichten der Posener Künstler gründeten jedoch zugleich in den Theorien des polnischen Romantikers Juliusz Slowacki, dessen Buch *Genesis z Ducha* (Genesis aus dem Geiste) auch andere polnische Künstler und Schriftsteller inspirierte (nicht nur die bereits genannten Przybyszewski und Miciński, sondern auch Stanisław Wyspiański, Franciszek Siedlecki, Leon Wyczółkowski und Stanisław Kubicki)¹⁷. Laut Slowacki steigt die Menschheit auf dem Wege der Metempsychose auf immer höhere Stufen ihrer Entwicklung und am Ende der Zeit entsteht auf der Welt ein Reich des Geistes. Die Analogie zu den Auffassungen Kandinskys und

¹⁵ Vgl. Halasa & Salamon, *Bunt. Ekspresjonizm Poznański*, 343, 348.

¹⁶ Vgl. Marek Bartelik, *Early Polish Modern Art. Unity in Multiplicity*, Manchester-New York 2005, 118.

¹⁷ Vgl. Gluchowska, *Avantgarde und Liebe*, 107, 110, 153.

anderer zeitgenössischer, theosophisch inspirierter Vertreter der Avantgarde, und damals kursierenden Vorstellungen einer Apokalypse, die das Ende des materialistischen Systems bringen würde, sind offensichtlich¹⁸. Zugleich zeigt sich das Anliegen, zu einer vergeistigten „neuen Welt“ zu kommen, bevölkert von einer „neuen Gemeinschaft“ von „neuen Menschen“.

Als Protagonisten des „neuen Menschen“ galten unter den Posener Künstlern Figuren wie Prometheus, Kain, der Heilige Franziskus (veranschaulicht u.a. in Hulewicz' Linolschnitt *Heiliger Franziskus* (1918) sowie im Pastell *Sonnenanbeter* von Stefan Szmajj (ca. 1921, cf. Fig. 27)¹⁹ und in Kubickis Bild *Der Heilige und die Tiere*, 1932). Auch Noah begegnet man in diesem Zusammenhang, u.a. als Protagonist einer zweisprachigen Gedichtsammlung von Kubicki, in der die avantgardistische Utopie des „neuen Menschen“ kritisch rekapituliert wird²⁰.

Als dritter Hintergrund der okkultistischen und esoterischen Tendenz in *Zdrój* sind die Theosophie und die Anthroposophie zu nennen. Inhaltlich wie formal zeugen zahlreiche Beiträge in *Zdrój* von einer Nähe zur Theosophie. In *Zdrój* erschienen nicht nur Besprechungen theosophischer Publikationen, sondern wurden auch Schriftsteller zur Zusammenarbeit eingeladen, die theosophische Ansichten vertraten. Nicht selten kam es dabei zu polemischen Auseinandersetzungen über den richtigen Weg. Ein Beispiel dieser Auseinandersetzung ist eine Debatte, die durch die Diskussion zwischen Kazimierz Wize, dem Rezensenten von Kazimierz Łuczewskis Buch *Wykłady metafizyczne. Wstęp. Kosmologia, psychologia, teozofia* (Metaphysische Vorträge. Kosmologie, Psychologie, Theosophie), und dem Autor selbst entfacht wurde und ein ganzes Jahr – vom Dezember 1917 bis Dezember 1918 – in den Heften der Zeitschrift ausgetragen wurde.

Theosophische Einflüsse findet man auch bei Stanisław Kubicki, *spiritus rector* der Gruppe Bunt, der in seiner Besprechung des Buches *Buddyzm a chrześcijaństwo* (Buddhismus und Christentum) von Tadeusz Taczaks auf die Vorzüge des Buddhismus hinwies. 1919 kürte ein weiterer Programmatiker der Zeitschrift *Zdrój*, Jerzy Stur, den theosophisch-mystischen Schriftsteller Tadeusz Miciński zum wichtigsten postromantischen

¹⁸ Vgl. Malinowski, *Sztuka i nowa wspólnota*, 98-101

¹⁹ Vgl. Hałasa & Salamon, *Bunt. Ekspresjonizm Poznański*, 372-6.

²⁰ Vgl. Lidia Gluchowska, „Revolution – Der verlorene Sohn – Noah – Irrenhaus. Sprache, Leit motive und Stilistik der deutsch-polnischen Dichtung Stanisław Kubicki“, in: Lidia Gluchowska & Peter Mantis (Hrsg.), *Stanisław Kubicki. Ein Poet übersetzt sich selbst/ Poeta tłumaczy sam siebie*. Berlin 2003, 32-43; Gluchowska, *Avantgarde und Liebe*, 197, 243, 263, 269, 339, 340, 344, 369.

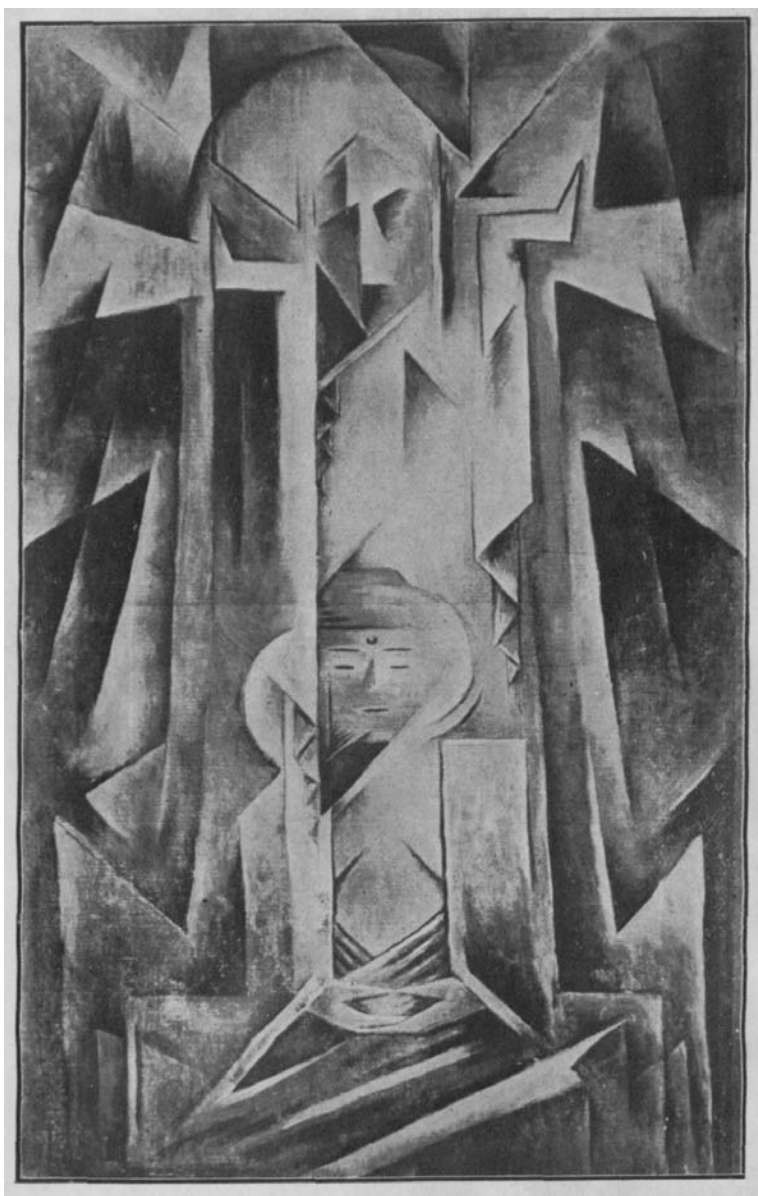


Fig. 29: Jerzy Hulewicz, *Buddha im Querschnitt Christi (Mysterium)*, Öl auf Leinwand, 1921 (verschollen). Abbildung aus: *Zdrój*, Bd. XIV, 1922.

Dichter der polnischen Nationalliteratur. In den frühen 20er Jahren bildeten – veranlasst von Stur – Theosophie, Sozialpsychologie und Astrologie wichtige thematische Schwerpunkte in *Zdrój*. Auch in späteren Jahren, als *Zdrój* bereits eingestellt war, trafen sich einige Mitarbeiter auf dem Gut Koscianki in der Nähe von Posen zu spiritistischen Seancen. Margarete Kubicka stellte in ihrer Aquarellserie *Hommage à Kubicki* (1924), in der sie die Rolle des Künstlers in der modernen Gesellschaft reflektiert, ihren Mann u.a. mit den Planeten (Fig. 28) sowie als Okkultisten und Buddhisten dar. Ähnlich kosmisch-transzendent ist die Aussage von Kubickas Hinterglasbild *Weltenwanderer*, wahrscheinlich aus dem selben Jahr²¹.

Die theosophisch beeinflusste, überkonfessionelle Ikonographie des Transzedenten, die auch in anderen Kreisen der Avantgarde eine synkretische Religiosität zum Ausdruck brachte, zeigt sich u.a. in Hulewicz' Bild *Buddha im Querschnitt Christi* (ca. 1921, cf. Fig. 29). Die religiös-mystische, überkonfessionelle Thematik inspirierte auch Werke anderer Bunt-Künstler, wie etwa im bereits genannten Pastell *Sonnenanbeter* von Stefan Szmaj sowie in Szmajs Linolschnittserie *Götzen* (1918), die die wichtigsten Figuren und Protagonisten der Weltreligionen darstellt. Dazu zählen die Urmutter, der Urvater, Mzimu, der slawische Götze der vier Gesichter, der Weltsehende, Mars, Astarte, Zarathustra und Mahomet²². Zugleich griffen einige Bunt-Künstler, ähnlich wie Kandinsky, Kupka und Boccioni, andere strukturelle Mittel der Ikonographie des Unsichtbaren auf. Die Bewegung als Signum der Vergeistigung wird besonders ausdrucksvoll in Hulewicz' Linolschnitten zu Slowackis *Genesis* z. *Ducha* und in zahlreichen Werken Kubickis zum Thema Wachstum (wie *Keimling*, *Das Blühen*, *Blühender Kaktus* und *Algen*, 1919-1931) veranschaulicht – mit der offenkundigen Absicht, die Idee einer geistigen Revolution zu veranschaulichen²³.

Lothar Schreyer und das Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar

Ein anderer Künstlerkreis, in dem Esoterisches, Mystisches und Okkultes eine wichtige Rolle spielte, ist das frühe Bauhaus in Weimar. Anders als im Fall der Gruppe Bunt gibt es schon seit langem ein ausgeprägtes For-

²¹ Vgl. Gluchowska, *Avantgarde und Liebe*, 165, 176-181, 263, 347; Bartelik, *Early Modern Polish Art*, 58.

²² Vgl. Halasa & Salamon, *Bunt. Ekspresjonizm Poznański*, 372-6.

²³ Vgl. Gluchowska, *Avantgarde und Liebe*, 188, 237.

schungsinteresse für das Bauhaus. Dabei wird erst seit einigen Jahren auch dem Bezug zu esoterisch-okkulten Lehren zunehmend Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet. Einiges ist mittlerweile darüber bekannt, wie diese Lehren in die künstlerische Arbeit der sogenannten mystischen Fraktion vom Bauhaus eingeflossen sind. Zu den wichtigsten Inspirationen zählten hier die Vorträge, Schriften und Wirken des Anthroposophen Rudolf Steiner, die Theosophische Gesellschaft, der George-Kreis, die Lebensreformbewegung, die Astrologie sowie die so genannte Mazdaznan-Lehre. Diese Einflüsse sind nicht nur im Werk Kandinskys, sondern auch bei Paul Klee deutlich erkennbar. Die Verwendung esoterischer Symbolik und Ornamente, darunter etwa ägyptische Hieroglyphe, ist ebenfalls bei Johannes Itten und Georg Muche eindeutig²⁴. Dabei ging es ihnen im Okkultismus und in der Esoterik abermals nicht zuletzt um einen Weg zur Verwirklichung nicht nur eigener ästhetischen Konzepte, sondern vor allem auch der Utopie vom „neuen Menschen“.

Eine besondere, bislang nur ansatzweise beschriebene Rolle spielte in diesem Kontext Lothar Schreyer, der in den zehner Jahren enger Mitarbeiter von Herwarth Walden wurde, Büroredakteur des *Sturms* und Grundleger der experimentellen *Sturm Bühne* war.

In Schreyers Schaffen wird die Ikonographie des Unsichtbaren nicht nur praktiziert, sondern auch umfangreich theoretisch reflektiert. Sein im Deutschen Literaturarchiv in Marbach am Neckar aufbewahrter Nachlaß bietet eine einzigartige Möglichkeit zur Rekonstruktion der Wirkung okkultistischer, esoterischer und mystischer Lehren auf das Schaffen der Avantgarde. Hierbei verdienen nicht nur seine programmatischen Texte zur Avantgardepraxis, sondern auch seine zahlreichen Abhandlungen zur – deutschen – Mystik besondere Aufmerksamkeit. Zu nennen sind u.a. von ihm besorgten Editionen von Texten deutscher Mystiker wie Meister Eckehart, Jakob Böhme und Angelus Silesius²⁵, sowie eine größere Zahl von Büchern, Artikeln und unveröffentlichten Manuskripten zur deutschen Mystik, darunter *Die Lehre des Jakob Böhme* (1925), *Die Mystik der Deutschen. Vom Reich der Liebe* (1933), *Die Gottesgeburt im Menschen. Gespräch*

²⁴ Vgl. Wagner, *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*.

²⁵ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer (Hrsg.), *Jakob Böhme – Vom dreifachen Leben des Menschen*, Hamburg 1924; Lothar Schreyer (Hrsg.), *Angelus Silesius. Sprüche*, Berlin 1924; Lothar Schreyer (Hrsg.) *Deutsche Mystik*, Berlin 1925; Lothar Schreyer, *Der Weg zu Gott. Zeugnisse deutscher Mystik. Worte von Meister Eckehart, Heinrich Seuse, Johannes Tauler*, Freiburg i/B 1939; Schreyer, *Jakob Böhme – Vom dreifachen Leben des Menschen*; sowie die von Schreyer besorgte, in Druckfahnen in seinem Nachlaß erhaltene Ausgabe von Meister Eckhart: *Von der Armut im Geiste*. Vierte Veröffentlichung der Vereinigung der Freunde mystischer Literatur (1927), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 9, Mappe 8.

um *Meister Eckehart* (1935) und *Die Vollendeten. Mystiker-Biographien* (1949), „Emanuel Swedenborg“ (1949), die unveröffentlichten Buchmanuskripte „Meister Eckehart. Deutsche Werke“²⁶ und „Die deutsche Mystik im Elsaß“²⁷ (beide 1944 abgeschlossen), ein „Versuch eines Strukturbildes des kosmisch-himmlichen Menschen“ (1924)²⁸ sowie die 1931-32 als vervielfältigtes Manuskript in sechs Lieferungen von Schreyer im Selbstverlag herausgegebene Zeitschrift *Der Stern*²⁹. Genauso interessant sind seine Beiträge zur Dämonologie und Magie, seine esoterischen und okkultistischen Zeichnungen, seine Beiträge in Veröffentlichungen der Vereinigung der Freunde mystischer Literatur sowie seine Entwürfe für gemalte Kirchenfenster, gemalte Glasfenster eines anthroposophischen Krankenhauses in Den Haag (um 1926)³⁰ und Bühnenedwürfe für das Bauhaus-theater.

Schreyer publizierte in der Zeitschrift *Theosophie*³¹ und war – wie mehrere andere Avantgardekünstler – sogar Mitglied der Theosophischen Gesellschaft³², und – ähnlich wie sie – interessierte er sich für esoterisch geprägte Farbenlehren, etwa die von Kandinsky und Goethe³³. Ebenso beschäftigte ihn die Wirkung der Maske, des Klangs, des Wortes und der Bewegung in der gegenwärtigen Bühnenkunst, die er als Versuch des Mysterienspiels sah³⁴. In seiner Bezugnahme auf okkultes, esoterisches und mystisches Schrifttum bildete die deutsche Mystik das A und O. Auch

²⁶ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Meister Eckehart. Deutsche Werke. Auswahl und Einführung“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1984, Kasten 7.

²⁷ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Die deutsche Mystik im Elsaß“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1984, Kasten 5, Mappe 1.

²⁸ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Versuch eines Strukturbildes des kosmisch-himmlichen Menschen“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 11, Mappe 11.

²⁹ *Der Stern. Monatschrift*, Nr. 1-6, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 23.

³⁰ Vgl. Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 29.

³¹ Vgl. u.a. Lothar Schreyer, „Jacob Böhme“, in: *Theosophie*, 1, 1925, 18-32; Lothar Schreyer, „Jacob Böhme (Fortsetzung), II. Das menschliche Leben“, in: *Theosophie*, 2, 1925, 118-33; Lothar Schreyer, „Jacob Böhme (Schluß), III. Christosophie“, in: *Theosophie*, 3, 1925, 196-212.

³² Das Mitgliedschaftsbeweis von Lothar Schreyer in der Theosophischen Gesellschaft befindet sich im Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 9, Mappe 3.

³³ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Anmerkungen zu Goethes Farbenlehre“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 7, Mappe 1; sowie Lothar Schreyer „Die Farbe als Ausdrucksmittel der Bühnenkunst“, in: „Der Begriff der Bühnenkunst IV“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1984, Kasten 3.

³⁴ Schreyer, MS *Versuche um das Mysterienspiel*, Zug. 1984, K. 10, M. 2 Dramen.

wenn er sich gelegentlich auf andere Quellen bezog, insbesondere aus der katholischen Tradition, so bildete die Mystik deutscher Provenienz Schreyers wichtigste Orientierung, was vor dem Hintergrund seiner politischen Stellungnahmen der 20er Jahre nicht zu überraschen braucht. Seit dem Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs bewegte sich Schreyer in rechtskonservativen deutschnationalen Kreisen, die wohl zum Spektrum der „konservativen Revolution“³⁵ gezählt werden. Er war regelmäßiger Beiträger der Zeitschrift *Deutsches Volkstum*, herausgegeben von dem antisemitischen Konservativen Wilhelm Stapel³⁶, wie auch des erzkonservativen, nicht weniger antisemitischen und nationalistischen *Deutschen Adelsblatts*. Ab 1928, als Schreyer mit Herwarth Walden und dem *Sturm* brach, trat er als Lektor bei der deutschnationalen Hanseatischen Verlagsanstalt an, die *Deutsches Volkstum* publizierte aber auch schon 1922 eine erste Veröffentlichung Schreyers, ein politisches Pamphlet für eine deutschnationale Politik unter dem Titel *Verantwortlich* erscheinen ließ. Bei der Hanseatischen Verlagsanstalt erschienen auch Schreyers Schriften über Jakob Böhme und die *Mystik der Deutschen*. Ansonsten prägt eine breite Palette esoterischer, okkultistischer und mystischer Lehren das „kosmische“ Vokabular in seinen theoretischen Reflexionen, ebenso wie sein bildkünstlerisches Werk und seine Bühnentheorie³⁷. Dabei tauchen die Begriffe Magie und Mystik in unterschiedlichsten Wortzusammenstellungen und Kontexten auf³⁸.

Ein prägnantes Beispiel für Schreyers esoterischen Realisationen sind zwei so genannte Totenhäuser von 1922, *Totenhaus der Frau* und *Totenhaus des Mannes*, die er allerdings nicht als Kunst-, sondern als Kultgegenstände verstand³⁹. Im Mittelpunkt des (im Gegenteil zu seinem männlichen Pen-

³⁵ Vgl. Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932*, Darmstadt 1994.

³⁶ Vgl. J. Dedeurwaerder, *Lothar Schreyer. Kronzeuge von STURM und BAUHAUS*, Gent 1958.

³⁷ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Die kosmischen Welten“, „Die kosmischen Bewegungsercheinungen“ und „Der kosmische Ton“, in: „Die Befreiung der Bühnenkunst“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1984, Kasten 10.

³⁸ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Das christliche Bild heute – Magie und Mystik“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 1, Mappe 4; Lothar Schreyer, „Zwischen Technik, Magie und Mystik“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 1, Mappe 10; Lothar Schreyer, „Das magische Bild und das mystische Sinnbild Christi“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Zugang 1990, Kasten 2, Mappe 11.

³⁹ Vgl. Klaus Weber, „Totenbild, Lebensleib und Maske. Lothar Schreyers Totenhäuser“, in: Christoph Wagner (Hrsg.), *Johannes Itten – Wassily Kandinsky – Paul Klee. Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, Bielefeld 2005, 91-7.

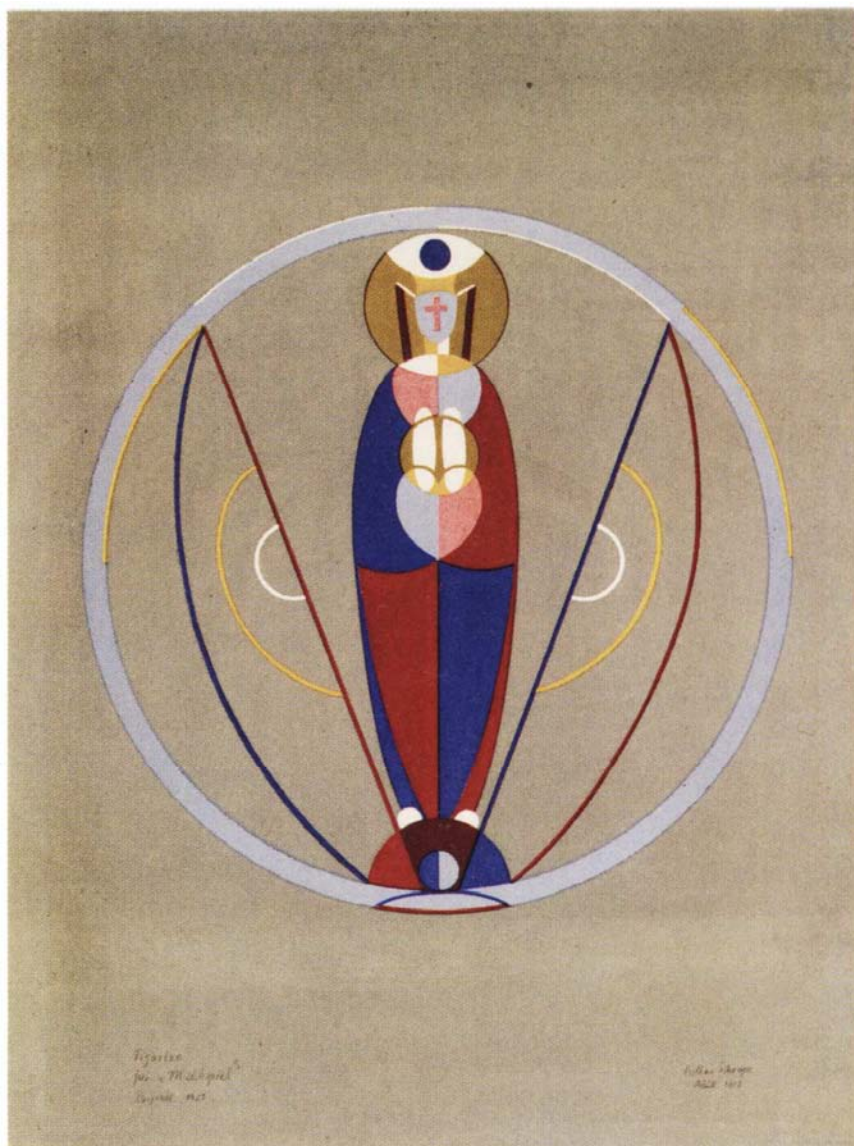


Fig. 30: Lothar Schreyer, *Maria im Mond* aus dem *Mondspiel*. Abbildung aus: Christoph Wagner, *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, Bielefeld/Leipzig 2005, 180.

dant) sehr harmonischen *Totenhauses der Frau*, welches Assoziationen mit archaischen Kultfiguren oder weiblichen Idolen hervorruft, steht die Figurine *Maria im Mond*, entworfen für eine Theaterinszenierung namens *Mondspiel* (Fig. 30)⁴⁰. Wie in den Werken Franz Marcs und Wassily Kandinskys dient die Farbe Blau als Signum des Geistigen. Wie Klaus Weber vermerkt, hatte Kandinsky die Totenbilder – und Schreyer widersprach ihm darin nicht – als „Ka“, den mystischen Lebensleib“ interpretiert. Sie seien im Sinne von Böhmes Lehre als Abbilder eines vegetabilen Bewusstseinszustandes zu verstehen. Die ihm zugeordnete Seelenform sei die „*evestrum*“, des Schattens, der Figur der Leere⁴¹. Schreyers Totenhäuser wurden – wie seine Figurinen – für seine avantgardistischen Theaterspiele entworfen und repräsentieren archetypische Werte und Menschentypen. Sie sind „nie dramatische Charaktere im herkömmlichen Sinne, sondern überindividuelle Typen“ oder in Schreyers Terminologie, „Urbilder“⁴². Sie heißen Mann, Frau, Geliebte, Mutter, Kind, Tod usw. Der männliche und weibliche Archetyp der Totenbilder finden in diesen dramatischen ‘Urbildern’ sowohl inhaltliche wie auch formale Entsprechungen⁴³, wobei die vergeistigten Figuren letztendlich Einzelercheinungen des „kosmischen Menschen“ sind, der dem *Menschen im Farbkreis* (1919-1920) von Johannes Itten ähnelt und in Schreyers bildkünstlerischer Praxis und in seinen theoretischen und literarischen Schriften eine besonders wichtige Rolle einnimmt⁴⁴. Besonders in Schreyers theoretischer Begründung ist der starke Bezug auf eine Mystik, die er als „deutsch“ umschreibt und in ihren Grundzügen nicht zuletzt in den Monatsheften des *Deutschen Volkstums* konturiert wurde, zu erkennen. Sämtliche „deutsche“ Mystiker, die Schreyer in den Vordergrund stellt, findet man in der Regel schon im *Deutschen Volkstum* bevor sie wenig später bei Schreyer auftauchen.

⁴⁰ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Das Geheimnis Marias. Mondspiel“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Zugang 1990, Kasten 2, Mappe 19.

⁴¹ Vgl. Weber, „Totenbild“, 95; vgl. Lothar Schreyer, *Expressionistische Theater*, Hamburg 1948, 58.

⁴² Vgl. Schreyer, *Expressionistisches Theater*, 22.

⁴³ Vgl. Weber, „Totenbild“, 96.

⁴⁴ Vgl. Lothar Schreyer, „Der bewegte Mensch“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Sturm-Archiv, Sign. 77897, und „Versuch eines Strukturbildes“ (Manuskript), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Schreyer, Sturm-Archiv, Sign. 63.975a.

Zum Schluss

Die Fälle von Lothar Schreyer und der Posener Künstlergruppe Bunt zeigen auf exemplarische Weise, dass die mystische, okkultistische und esoterische Dimension des Avantgardeprojekts nicht ausschließlich auf transnationale Muster und Vorlagen, wie z.B. die der Theosophie bzw. der Anthroposophie und jene der Utopie des „neuen Menschen“ bzw. einer „neuen Gemeinschaft“, zurückgeführt werden kann. Neben diesen Mustern griff die Avantgarde zum Teil auch auf lokale, in der damaligen Zeit national und teils nationalistisch geprägte Traditionszusammenhänge zurück. Die Trennungslinie zwischen internationalem Gedankengut des Okkultismus einerseits und lokalen Denkmustern, die häufig national(is-tisch) fundiert waren, sollte in diesem Zusammenhang nicht als eine absolute gesetzt werden. Vielmehr gilt es, das Ineinandergreifen lokaler und internationaler Traditionen näher zu betrachten und in Einzelheiten zu erschließen. Die Anknüpfung an die Anthroposophie bei Schreyer und im weiteren Kontext des Bauhauses hatte sicherlich auch ihre nationale Dimension, insofern Steiners Lehre als neuer Ausdruck der Tradition deutscher bzw. germanischer Mystik betrachtet wurde. Die Anthroposophie lässt sich in diesem Kontext freilich auch als Bestandteil einer international verbreiteten Denktradition des modernen Okkultismus begreifen, auf die in unterschiedlichen nationalen Zusammenhängen zurückgegriffen werden konnte. Durch die Verbindung solcher grenzübergreifenden Theorien mit nationalen Denktraditionen wurde diesen sicherlich auch teilweise eine nationale Färbung gegeben. Im Fall Steiners gilt dies nicht nur für den deutschen Kulturraum, wegen seiner slawophilen Ansichten – in einigen Texten hat er unterstrichen, dass die aufkommende „geistige“ Kulturepoche ihren Ursprung im slawischen Kulturraum finden sollte – war das Interesse für seine Schriften in den mittelosteuropäischen Ländern zum Teil auch nationalistisch inspiriert⁴⁵. Ähnliches gilt für die breitere Tradition des philosophischen Irrationalismus, die wichtiger Bestandteil der Idee des „Okkulten“ im frühen 20. Jahrhundert war. So war die Nietzsche-Rezeption nicht nur im deutschen Sprachraum teilweise mit einem Kult des Germanischen verbunden und die Theorien Bergsons wurden im Kontext der französischen Avantgarde zum Teil als Ausdruck einer dynamischen „romanischen“ Weltauffassung verstanden und dem starren Weltbild einer „germanisch-

⁴⁵ Vgl. Renata von Maydell, „Anthroposophy in Russia“, in: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Hrsg.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Ithaca-London 1997, 153-67.

en“ Kultur gegenübergestellt⁴⁶. In den Werken von Schreyer und Bunt lassen sich nicht nur die Anknüpfungen an unterschiedliche nationale Denktraditionen des Okkultismus, sondern auch die Rolle dieser Traditionen bei der Aneignung international verbreiteter Ideen in unterschiedlichen nationalen Zusammenhängen exemplarisch beschreiben. Abgesehen davon, dass sowohl zu Schreyer wie zu Bunt weitere Forschungslücken zu schließen sind, stellt sich die Frage, inwiefern der Umgang Schreyers und der Bunt-Künstler nicht nur für sie, sondern für eine breitere Strömung der Avantgarde charakteristisch ist. Neben der generellen Berücksichtigung international verfügbarer Kontexte, wie jenes der Theosophie und der Anthroposophie, fordert die eingehende Historiographie der Aneignung okkultistischer, esoterischer und mystischer Ideen durch die internationale Avantgarde zusätzlich auch eine profunde Studie der lokalen Entstehungskontexte.

⁴⁶ Vgl. Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson. Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, Princeton 1993.

Apokalypse als Narrenspiel: Kurt Schwitters und die Mystik

Götz-Lothar Darsow (Fachhochschule Hannover)

Die Jahre um den Ersten Weltkrieg waren erfüllt von einem neu erwachten Interesse an Mystik. Vor dem Krieg wuchs das Unbehagen über eine zunehmende „Entzauberung der Welt“ (Max Weber), und viele suchten Orientierung in mystischen Geheimlehren und ihren Spekulationen. 1912 beobachtete der junge Walter Benjamin eine „Ausbreitung der Mystik“¹. In einer zerbrochenen Welt nach dem Krieg war die „mechanistische Zivilisation“ (Walther Rathenau) mit ihrer metaphysischen Leere erst recht kompromittiert. Überall wurden mystische Quellen ob christlich-mittelalterlicher, jüdisch-kabbalistischer oder fernöstlicher Provenienz angezapft, um einer mehr und mehr als defizitär empfundenen Moderne zu begegnen. Hier glaubte man einer Welt zu begegnen, die unberührt war von den „kalten Skeletthänden rationaler Ordnungen“², welche die wirkliche Welt gerade in ihre größte Katastrophe gestürzt hatte. Der Publizist und Schriftsteller Siegfried Kracauer stellte 1922 fest: „Daß auch die Nebenbäche der Religionen zu fließen beginnen, beweist die Zuwendung zur Mystik“³. Man könnte noch zahlreiche Beispiele anführen, die dies weitverbreitete Interesse in der deutschen Gesellschaft in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts zeigen.

Im Kreis der Zürcher Dadaisten um Hugo Ball und Hans Arp spielte mystisches Schrifttum eine zentrale Rolle – wie man aus ihren Erinnerungen erfahren kann⁴. Für Arp soll die Lektüre der Schriften des protes-

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Unter Mitwirkung von Theodor W. Adorno und Gershom Scholem hrsg. von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Band II, 1, Frankfurt am Main 1974, 31.

² Max Weber, „Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen“, in: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, I, Tübingen 1988, 561.

³ Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse*, Frankfurt am Main 1977, 112.

⁴ Vgl. Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, Zürich 1992, 162 und passim. „Der strahlende Glanz der mystischen Dichtungen“, schrieb Arp, „zog uns an, in denen der Mensch von Freuden und Leiden befreit wird. Es war der ‚unbekümmerte Grund‘, wie Tauler ihn nannte, nach

tantischen Mystikers Jacob Böhme (1575-1624) tägliches Brot gewesen sein. Auch die Suche des Expressionismus nach metaphysischen Dimensionen für eine Erneuerung der Kunst fand hier eine reiche Quelle. Lothar Schreyer als eine zentrale Gestalt der *Sturm*-Künstler in den Jahren um den Ersten Weltkrieg sah seine intensive Beschäftigung mit dem Werk Böhmes „im Expressionismus selbst begründet“⁵.

Kurz vor Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs hatte Kurt Schwitters die beiden folgenreichsten Begegnungen seiner Künstlerkarriere. Durch den Kontakt zum *Sturm* gelang ihm der künstlerische Durchbruch, während etwa zur gleichen Zeit die Freundschaft und Zusammenarbeit mit Hans Arp begann. Durch Schwitters' Vermittlung erschien 1920 im Paul-Steegemann-Verlag in Hannover der Gedichtband des Freundes *Die Wolkenpumpe*. Einigen Exemplaren lag eine Notiz bei, die ausdrücklich auf Jacob Böhme hinweist, den Arp immer wieder als Inspirationsquelle nannte. Durch diese engen Verbindungen muss Schwitters mit der mystischen Gedankenwelt mittelalterlicher und frühneuzeitlicher Provenienz in Berührung gekommen sein. Sie ist auch in sein Werk eingegangen – wenn gleich auf eine verborgene Weise, um das Werk ungestört von allzu einsinnigen Interpretationen in allen seinen Facetten zu bewahren – nicht zuletzt die des Komischen.

Was aber hat Schwitters selbst mit dem Wort „mystisch“ verbunden? In einem Brief an Raoul Hausmann vom Sommer 1946 wird „mystisch“ im Sinne von geheimnisvoll und enigmatisch verstanden: „*Wir schreiben quadrils (Houseman) und triquadras (Merz-Schwitters)*.‘ Ich würde nicht sagen, was das ist, weil es dann interessanter und mystischer ist. *Unsere phantastischen quadrils und triquadras sind erfüllt von Mystik und treffen auf einen Mangel an Geist nach dem Kriege*“⁶. „Geistvoll“ wird hier zum Synonym für „mystisch“, das als vieldeutig und rätselhaft gefasst wird. Rätselhaftigkeit aber ist für Schwitters ein konstituierender Faktor seiner Werke: Immer wenn Kritiker, auf das Geheimnisvolle seiner Kunst hingewiesen haben, konnten sie seiner Zustimmung sicher sein.

Zum andern wird mit „mystisch“ das spezifisch mystische und kabbalistische Gedankengut und Schrifttum gemeint worden sein, das Schwitters aus ganz verschiedenen Quellen bekannt wurde. Aber hierzu hat er sich niemals geäußert – ähnlich wie im Fall der Wahl des Namens „Merz“ für seine Kunst: bestimmte Gründe dafür wollte er bis zuletzt

dem wir uns sehnten“. (Hans Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum ... Erinnerungen und Dichtungen aus den Jahren 1914-1954*, Zürich 1955, 23f.).

⁵ Lothar Schreyer, *Expressionistisches Theater. Aus meinen Erinnerungen*, Hamburg 1948, 32.

⁶ Brief Kurt Schwitters an Raoul Hausmann vom 15. August 1946, in: *Kurt Schwitters – Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abbolt*, hrsg. von Ernst Nündel, Frankfurt am Main-Berlin 1986, 218.

nicht preisgeben. Als Schwitters über 20 Jahre nach der Erfindung seiner Merzkunst darauf hingewiesen wurde, dass „Merz“ doch ein deutsches Wort für etwas sei, das bedeutungslos ist oder das man wegwirft, ein anderes Wort für das englische „rubbish“, also Abfall oder auch Unsinn – da soll er geantwortet haben, dass „Merz“ nichts anderes sei als die zweite Silbe von „Kommerz“. Sie sei ganz „organisch“ beim Collagieren in ein Bild geraten und so habe er seine Kunst dann genannt. Erst der Einführungstext von Herbert Read zur Londoner Ausstellung im Dezember 1944 enthüllte die wahre Bedeutung: „Merz is a German word meaning anything thrown away, cast off, rejected – in short, rubbish“⁷.

Auch die ästhetischen Prämissen, die zu der ganz besonderen Materialwahl des Merzkünstlers geführt haben, verdanken sich zum Teil der mystischen Gedankenwelt. Zivilisationsmüll als Material für Kunstwerke konterkariert die Schnellebigkeit der modernen Industriegesellschaft und ihren Umgang mit den Dingen. So soll Schwitters laut Lothar Schreyers Erinnerungen 1918 gesagt haben: „Höchst verdächtig ist mir dieser Geschwindigkeitswahn“. Wenn dessen Erinnerung zutrifft, hat Schwitters die Beschleunigungstendenzen der Moderne gar dämonisiert, denn lakonisch soll er hinzugefügt haben: „Der Teufel hat es eilig“⁸.

Schreyers Erinnerungen an den Merzkünstler haben den bezeichnenden Titel „Der Lumpensammler“, ein Wort von gleicher Bedeutung wie das heute aus dem allgemeinen Sprachgebrauch verschwundene „Merzler“. Sollte sich der „Merzler“ Schwitters am Beginn seines ganz einzigartigen Kunstkonzepts doch einmal über dessen Ursprünge auch aus mystischen Quellen geäußert haben? Die geradezu schwärmerische Diktion der Rede des Merzkünstlers (wie sie Schreyer wiedergibt) kulminiert in einer Charakterisierung seiner Kunst, die man fast religiös nennen kann. „[...] wir malen“, heißt es da,

mit dem sog.[enannten] Dreck [...], der ehemals Ding und Ding und Ding war, malen ein Bild – das Bild des Glaubens an die Wiederauferstehung, an die Heimholung der Dinge, an die Verkündigung der großen Ordnung, in der all das, was lebte und starb, ein Ding war und Dreck wurde, seinen drecklosen Ort finden wird. Blicken wir doch durch den sog. Dreck [...] hindurch! Heiliges Lumpengesindel! Ja! Ja! Ja! Wir malen das heilige Bild vom Menschen.⁹

⁷ Herbert Read, „Kurt Schwitters“ (1944), in: *Kurt Schwitters Almanach*, 8, hrsg. von Michael Erlhoff und Klaus Stadtmüller, Hannover 1989, 32.

⁸ Lothar Schreyer, *Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus*, München 1956, 117.

⁹ Schreyer, *Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus*, 117.

Unter diesem Aspekt bekommt die Verwendung des „lumpigen“ Materials in Schwitters' Merzbildern eine geradezu soteriologische Dimension. „In einer Welt“, schreibt Susan Sontag, „die auf dem besten Weg ist, eine einzige große Fundgrube zu werden, fällt dem Sammler gewissermaßen ein frommes Rettungswerk zu“¹⁰. Nach Schreyer hat der Merzkünstler hier das Mystische seiner Kunst verortet, die noch das Geringste für wert achtet, um es im Werk aufzuheben, ja „heimzuholen“: „Die geheimnisvolle Achtung vor dem Verachteten schuf ein Kunstwerk“¹¹.

Die Rettung und Achtung der Dinge, die in ihrer scheinbaren Bedeutungslosigkeit der Vernichtung preisgegeben sind, ist ein zentraler Gedanke der Mystik. Es „sey in dieser Welt was es wolle“, schreibt Jacob Böhme, „und wenn es gleich kaum eine Stunde stehen oder bleiben soll, es wird alles in der Dreyheit, oder nach dem Gleichniß Gottes geboren“¹². Alles, auch das Geringste, das schnell wieder verschwindet, ist wert, als Gleichnis Gottes angesehen zu werden.

Schwitters hat sich selbst nie in der Weise publizistisch über seine Merzkunst geäußert, die Schreyers Erinnerung entspräche. Aber nicht nur der hohe Ton der Künstler, die wie Schwitters die Erschütterung der Zeit um den Ersten Weltkrieg aussprachen, lässt die überlieferte Diktion des Merzkünstlers glaubhaft erscheinen. Ein Indiz dafür, dass Schreyers Bericht zutrifft, findet sich im *Huttbild*. Dort hat Schwitters mehrfach den Namen „Schreyer“ vermerzt (so nannte er sein Collagieren) und im unteren Teil des Bildes, das durch ein Kreuz gegliedert ist, Ausrisse aus einem Text mit religiösem Inhalt collagiert¹³. Vor allem das Textfragment, in dem vom „Erlöser“ die Rede ist, der die „sündige“ Welt „schneeweiß waschen“ wird, entspricht den Erinnerungen Schreyers, wo vom „drecklosen Ort“ (der Kunst) die Rede war. So liegt es nahe, die von Schwitters versammelten Elemente im Sinn eines Kontextes zu deuten, der zwischen dem Merzkünstler und Schreyer zur Sprache gekommen ist: religiöse Mystik.

¹⁰ Susan Sontag, *Über Fotografie*, Frankfurt am Main 1980, 77.

¹¹ Schreyer, *Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus*, 115.

¹² Jacob Böhme, *Aurora, oder Morgenröthe im Aufgang*, in: *Sämtliche Werke* (Faksimile-Neudruck der Ausgabe von 1730 in 11 Bänden begonnen von August Faust, neu herausgegeben von Will-Erich Peuckert), Bd.1, Stuttgart 1955-1961, 49.

¹³ Die Textfragmente lauten u.a.: „mich und alle die Meinigen für [vor] einem bösen... Feu[er ...] Noth [...] für [...] Unglück sicher behüten. Darum befehle ich mich, mein Leib und Seel, und alles, was [...] meiner Sünden gnädiglich wiederfahren las[sen]/ [...] Sohnes, meines Erlösers schneeweiß waschen, und in seinen heiligen unschuldigen Wunden verbergen, und [...]“

Schwitters' Verfahren mit mystischen Vorstellungen in Verbindung zu bringen, rechtfertigt sich nicht zuletzt aus der Rezeption vieler Zeitgenossen. Wie Lothar Schreyer, der hannoversche Freund und Journalist Christof Spengemann oder, später im Londoner Exil, der Kunstkritiker Herbert Read haben das „Mystische“ seiner Werke betont, wie die Künstlerfreundin Hannah Höch das „Heilige“ oder wie Hans Arp, der Kritiker Adolf Behne und Wassily Kandinsky das „Geheimnisvolle“. Seine Favorisierung scheinbaren Unsinns, der heitere, ja vielfach komische Charakter vieler literarischer und bildnerischer Arbeiten lassen diese Dimensionen auf den ersten Blick nicht vermuten.

Walter, der Sohn von Christof Spengemann, soll von dem „seltsamen, allgegenwärtigen, ‚kabalistischen‘ [sic!] Handkoffer“¹⁴ gesprochen haben, den der Merzkünstler ständig mit sich führte. Diese aufschlussreiche Charakterisierung kommt aus dem engsten persönlichen Umfeld von Schwitters, vielleicht geht sie sogar auf ihn selbst zurück. Von diesem Koffer haben viele Zeitgenossen berichtet. In ihm befanden sich die Fundstücke, aus denen er seine Collagen und Assemblagen fertigte.

Ursonate

Zahlen und Buchstaben und die vielfältigen Spekulationen über deren Symbolgehalt¹⁵ spielen im mystischen Schrifttum kabbalistischer und christlicher Provenienz eine immense Rolle. Die *Ursonate* ist davon an entscheidenden Stellen der Komposition geprägt, vor allem durch die zentrale Funktion des Alphabets, das an ihrem Ende noch einmal vollständig zitiert wird. Dahinter verbirgt sich weit mehr als nur das elementare Substrat jeder Gestaltung mit Sprache und Schrift. Das Ritual-Formelhafte eines solchen Verfahrens, dessen beschwörender Charakter, auch dessen magisch-mystischer Ursprung war einem Zeitgenossen wie Walter Benjamin ganz und gar bewusst. Für ihn waren die Lautdichtungen „magische Wortexperimente, nicht artistische Spielereien sind die passionierten phonetischen und graphischen Verwandlungsspiele, die nun schon fünfzehn Jahre sich durch die gesamte Literatur der Avantgarde ziehen“¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Schwitters-Anekdoten*. Versammelt und mit einer Einleitung von Gerhard Schaub. Frankfurt am Main 1999, 14.

¹⁵ Vgl. Encausse Gérard Papus (Hrsg.), *Die Kabbala*, Paris 1903 (Bearbeitung Julius Nestler), 20: „die Worte und die sie zusammensetzenden Buchstaben [der Bibel] (sind) ebensovielen mystische Chiffren und Zahlen“.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II, 1, „Der Surrealismus“ (1929), 302.

schluss:	
Zätt üpsilon iks (<i>bewegt</i>)	(Y) 18
Wee fau Uu	
Tee äss ärr kuu	
Pee Oo änn ämm	
Ell kaa Ii haa	
Gee äff Ee dee zee beee?	
<hr/>	
Zätt üpsilon iks (<i>bewegter</i>)	18
Wee fau Uu	
Tee äss ärr kuu	
Pee Oo änn ämm	
Ell kaa Ii haa	
Gee äff Ee dee zee beee?	
<hr/>	
Zätt üpsilon iks (<i>einfach</i>)	18 a
Wee fau Uu	
Tee äss ärr kuu	
Pee Oo änn ämm	
Ell kaa Ii haa	
Gee äff Ee dee zee bec Aaaaa.	
<hr/>	
Zätt üpsilon iks (<i>sehr bewegt</i>)	(Z) 18
Wee fau Uu	
Tee äss ärr kuu	
Pee Oo änn ämm	
Ell kaa Ii haa	
Gee äff Eeee dee zee beeee? (<i>schmerzlich</i>)	
<hr/>	

Fig. 31: Kurt Schwitters, *Ursonate*, 1922-1932 (Schluss).

Die Einteilung der *Ursonate* in „26 Parzellen“ entspricht der Buchstabenanzahl des lateinischen Alphabets und verweist damit auf uralte alphanumerische Symbolisierungen. Denn das Alphabet ist nichts anderes als eine „kulturelle Grundmetapher für Vollkommenheit und Totalität“¹⁷. Die *Ursonate* wäre also nichts weniger als eine Darstellung des Ganzen der Welt, ein Projekt, das sich seiner Idee vom „Merzgesamtkunstwerk“¹⁸ nähert.

Zugleich erinnert diese Orientierung an der alphabetischen Ordnung aber auch an die *Lamentationen* des Propheten Jeremia, deren alttestamentarische Verse mit den Buchstaben entsprechend der Reihenfolge des hebräischen Alphabets beginnen, also die Form eines sogenannten alphabetischen Akrostichons haben. Diese berühmten Dichtungen sind Klagegesänge über die Verwüstung Jerusalems durch den zornigen Jahwe. Sie weisen damit auch inhaltlich auf die verborgene Schicht der *Ursonate*, die – wie Merz insgesamt – um Verwüstung und Rettung kreist.

Ein noch stärkeres Indiz für diese verborgene Schicht manifestiert sich darin, dass Schwitters das Alphabet viermal *rückwärts* zitiert, dreimal allerdings *ohne* das abschließende A; nur beim vorletzten Mal soll die vollständige Reihe von Z bis A erklingen. Denn diese Umkehrung der Buchstabenfolge des Ganzen ist im mystischen Denken kabbalistischer Provenienz von hoher Symbolkraft. Zusammen mit dem getilgten ersten Buchstaben deutet sie auf eine Welt, die von menschlicher Hybris entstellt ist. Gott wird nach kabbalistischer Vorstellung erst durch die Wiederherstellung der vom Menschen verkehrten Buchstabenfolge rehabilitiert. Dazu kommt die Löschung des ersten, des *'aleph*. Am Ende der *Ursonate* geschieht diese Katastrophe (griech. = Umkehr), die eine vom Menschen geschaffene luziferische und adamtische Welt vergehen lässt. In der Kabbala wird gesagt, dass beide Vorgänge – die Umkehrung der Buchstabenfolge wie das Ausmerzen, das Löschen des ersten Buchstabens – die ursprüngliche, die göttliche Schöpfungsordnung wieder in ihre Rechte setzen.

Ganz willkürlich müsste auch die viermalige Zitierung des Alphabets erscheinen, bliebe der mystische Hintergrund der *Ursonate* unberücksichtigt. Jacob Böhme bezeichnet Gott als „aller Alphabeten Eröffner“¹⁹ und nennt neben dem göttlichen Alphabet, das für den Menschen naturgemäß

¹⁷ Ulrich Berges, *Klagelieder*, Freiburg u.a. 2002, 76; Ebd.: „Das Alphabet [...] diene als Maßstab und Leitschnur, um die bitteren Erfahrungen der exilisch-nachexilischen Zeit in Worte zu fassen“.

¹⁸ Kurt Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, in fünf Bänden hrsg. von Friedrich Lach, Köln 1973f., Bd. 5, 79.

¹⁹ Jacob Böhme, *Mysterium Pansophicum*, in: *Sämtliche Schriften*, Bd. 4, 106.

unerkennbar bleiben muss, nur vier weitere: die von Gott gegebene Natursprache (das vollständige Alphabet in der *Ursonate*) und die „menschlichen“, historisch gewachsenen Alphabete. Es sind die drei für das christliche Abendland relevanten Schriftsysteme, das hebräische, das griechische und das lateinische – repräsentiert in der *Ursonate* durch die drei unvollständigen Alphabete.

Die Deutung der *Ursonate* als Metapher der Katastrophe wird von einer weiteren Besonderheit bekräftigt. Das Hauptthema des *presto* überschriebenen vierten Teils beginnt mit der Lautfolge „Grimm glimm gnimm bimbim“²⁰. Das Thema tritt in der von Schwitters *Ablösung* genannten Reprise wieder auf, bevor es am Ende – kurz vor der viermaligen Rezitation des (dreimal fragmentierten) Alphabets – erneut erscheint. „Grimm“ (oder „Grimmigkeit“) aber ist das Schlüsselwort Jacob Böhmes für die Existenz des Bösen in dieser Welt. Das Böse wird als Chaos vorgestellt, „als ein Sterben des gefassten Lebens“. Die chaotische Verwirrung, „die *Turba*, als der Grimm aller Creaturen“²¹, kommt für Böhme wie für die Kabbalisten nicht von Gott in die Welt, sondern von der geschaffenen Kreatur. Sie weckt – vom Satan angetrieben – den Grimm selbst auf, der sonst im Mysterium der Natur verschlossen bliebe. Für den Mystiker ist Gott „kein Macher in der Natur“, sondern bloß „ein Eröffner und Sucher des Guten“²². Die Kreatur selbst schafft in ihrer Verwirrung grimmig das Böse, das über das Unschuldige herrscht – ganz ohne Gottes Vorsatz und Eingreifen.

Schwitters ‚spielt‘ im letzten Satz der *Ursonate* mit dieser zentralen Kategorie des schlesischen Mystikers. Der durchaus bittere Klang des Wortes „Grimm“ wird durch die Konsonantenverschiebung zu „glimm“, ein Laut, der wie in Schwitters’ eruptiven expressionistischen Gedichten in der Nachfolge von August Stramm neue Assoziationsfelder zu erschließen vermag. Grimmiges, glimmendes Feuer, das Läuten der Brand- und Totenglocke („bimbim“ und „Bumm bimbim etc.“) – diese „*streng taktmäßig*“ vorzutragende Apokalypse des vierten Satzes kommt in den

²⁰ Die Ausarbeitung dieses Themas ist 1923, zur Zeit der engen Zusammenarbeit von Hans Arp und Kurt Schwitters, in der Zeitschrift *Mécano* Heft 4/5 erschienen. Dies ist die erste Veröffentlichung eines Teils der *Ursonate*, hier noch in der Fassung: „Grim glim gnim bimbim“. Gerade dies Thema hat Herbert Schuldt in seinem Aufsatz „Lautgestaltung. Beitrag zu einer Klärung des Begriffs an Hand der ‘Ursonate’“ zu folgendem Diktum veranlasst: „Einiges – so *Grimm Glimm Gnimm bimbim* – steht den Kinderstuben-Unsinnsprachen nahe“. In: *Text und Kritik*, 35/36, 1972, 11f.

²¹ Böhme, *Mysterium Pansophicum*, 104.

²² Böhme, *Mysterium Pansophicum*, 105.

rückwärts zitierten Alphabeten resignierend „*schmerzlich*“²³ (so Schwitters' Vortragsbezeichnungen) zu ihrem Ende. Feuer und Asche als Symbole von Zerstörung und Tod spiegeln auch hier wie in der gesamten Merz-Ästhetik die Erfahrungen der Katastrophe des Ersten Weltkriegs²⁴.

Auch in dem Abschnitt „Von der bitteren Qualität“ aus Jacob Böhmes Erstlingsschrift *Aurora*, den Hans Arp 1917 öffentlich in Zürich vorgelesen hatte, manifestiert sich der Zusammenhang von Grimm und zerstörerischem Feuer. Die „Grimmigkei“ beschreibt der Mystiker dort mit eindringlich-apokalyptischer Wortgewalt. Sie ist ihm „ein wahrhaftig Haus des Todes, eine Verderbung alles Guten eine Verderbniß und Verzeherung des Lebens im Fleische. Denn so sie sich in einer Creatur zu sehr erhebet, und entzündet sich in der Hitze, so scheidet sie Fleisch und Geist, und muß die Creatur des Todes sterben“²⁵. Feuer zerstört aber nicht nur den Menschen, sondern es vernichtet auch alle Farben²⁶. Welch düstere Vision des Mystikers!

Der Hinweis von Schwitters, dass „das lange ‚bee‘ außerordentlich wichtig“ sei, gewinnt erst durch die Deutung der *Ursonate* als einer Metapher der Zerstörung genauere Konturen. Das „bee“ erscheint bis auf wenige Ausnahmen in Kombination mit den Buchstabenfolgen „Rakete“ (1. und 4. Satz) und dem langen „Ooo“ (2. und 4. Satz). Die am Anfang des *Largo* zum ersten mal auftauchende Kombination „Ooo bee“, mit dem der letzte Satz der *Ursonate* durchsetzt ist, erinnert an ein bedrohlich-klagendes *O weh!*, zumal die Labiallaute b und w klanglich sehr ähnlich sind²⁷. Dass das „bee“ als Klagelaut aufzufassen ist, unterstreicht der ausdrückliche Hinweis von Schwitters auf seine Abwesenheit im *Scherzo*, das „*munter*“²⁸ vorgetragen werden soll.

²³ Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, Bd. 1, 242; vgl. 312: „Erklärungen zu meiner ursonate“: „beim schluß mache ich aufmerksam auf das beabsichtigte rückklingen des alfabetes bis zum a. man ahnt das und erwartet das a mit spannung. aber es hört zweimal schmerzlich bei bee auf. das bee klingt hier in der zusammenstellung schmerzlich. beruhigend folgt die auflösung im dritten alfabet beim a. nun aber folgt das alfabet zum schluß ein letztes und viertes mal und endet sehr schmerzlich auf beeee“.

²⁴ Vgl. Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, Bd. 5, 335: „Kaputt war sowieso alles, und es galt aus den Scherben Neues zu bauen. Das aber ist Merz. [...] Ich baute auf, und es kam mir mehr auf das Bauen als auf die Scherben an. Mehr kann ich nicht über meine Kunst schreiben“.

²⁵ Böhme, *Aurora oder Morgenröthe im Aufgang*, 28.

²⁶ Vgl. Böhme, *Mysterium Pansophicum*, 105: „Denn das Feuer ist aller Farben *Proba* [d.i. Prüfung], darinnen dann keine bestehet, als die Weisse, dieweil sie ein Glast [d.i. Glanz] von Gottes Majestät ist“.

²⁷ In seinem Aufsatz „Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift“ (Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, Bd. 5, 274 ff.) hat Schwitters b und w in die Kategorie der Lippenlaute als sehr ähnlich eingeordnet.

²⁸ Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, Bd. 1, 228 und 229.

Es scheint, dass Schwitters bei seinen Aufführungen die Bedeutung der *Ursonate* als einer Metapher der Apokalypse nicht nur klanglich, sondern manchmal auch durch theatralische Hilfsmittel ausgedrückt hat. So erzählt der Künstlerkollege Rudolf Jahns von einer *Ursonaten*-Performance in der kleinen Stadt Holzminden an der Weser:

Die Sache lief und lief – sie ist ja ziemlich lang, die Lautsonate, und mit einem Mal war Schluss. Schwitters hatte einen großen alten Porzellanteller in der Hand, den er sich von meiner Frau erbeten hatte, und schleuderte den – rumms – auf den Boden. Das war natürlich – schon wieder – im Grunde für viele Blödsinn.²⁹

Es war natürlich alles andere als bloßer „Blödsinn“ – Jahns, der tiefbeeindruckt den *Merzbau* besucht hat, ahnt das, aber er weiß nicht um die eigentliche Bedeutung. Schwitters beließ es auch hier bei seiner exzentrischen Manifestation, deren Sinn hinter dem Blödsinn verborgen blieb³⁰. Er muss eine besondere Freude daran gehabt haben, wenn dem Publikum seine Werke als blanker Unsinn erscheinen konnten. Aber selbst dann, wenn er nicht zu so drastischen Mitteln griff, konnte ein aufmerksamer Zuhörer offenbar eine Ahnung davon bekommen, dass hinter aller Komik und Exzentrik noch eine andere Schicht verborgen war. Das lässt eine Erinnerung von Manja Wilkens vermuten. Sie war die Tochter des Hamburger Juweliers und Mäzens Carl Wilkens, der Schwitters damit beauftragt hatte, sein Treppenhaus am Jungfernstieg auszumalen. Während der Arbeit intonierte der Merzkünstler „zur äussersten Befremdung der Benutzer des Aufgangs“ seine *Ursonate*, wobei sich „das Finale [...] zur phonetischen Apokalypse“ gesteigert habe³¹.

Auch die mit Schwitters befreundete Kunstkritikerin Carola Giedion-Welcker spürte hinter der komischen Fassade die Erfahrungen einer katastrophischen Welt:

Die Idylle ist bei Schwitters etwas gespenstig, denn man spürt eine aus ihren Fugen geratene, erschütterte Welt darunter, durchsetzt von Krieg, Inflation, von sozialen Spannungen, von Spartakus- und Kapp-Putschen. Und auch den Dichter selbst in seiner Empfindsamkeit getroffen und geschärft, in seinem Frieden

²⁹ „Als Schwitters noch in Waldhausen merzte. Der Maler Rudolf Jahns erinnert sich“, in: *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26. August 1982.

³⁰ Vgl. Gwendolen Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters*, Cardiff 1997, 35: “When engrossed in it [Merz] he [Schwitters] followed his own rules and regulations which often looked utterly eccentric, not to say scandalous, to others”.

³¹ Brief vom 10. Juni 1993 von Manja Louis, geb. Wilkens, an Gwendolen Webster, die dem Autor den Brief freundlicherweise zugänglich gemacht hat.

gestört, wissend um die Katastrophen, aber dennoch alles in ein tolles Narrenspiel verzaubernd.³²

Bild mit Drehrad

Das 1920 entstandene *Bild mit Drehrad* ist eine der größten und bedeutendsten Assemblagen von Schwitters, die ihren Titel Jacob Böhme verdanken könnte. In dessen 1620 entstandener Schrift *De Incarnatione Verbi, oder Von der Menschwerdung Christi* wird das „drehende Rad“ zur Metapher des „Centrum des Lebens“, der Angst: „Die Angst, als der Circul oder das *Centrum* des Lebens, das drehende Rad, das die Sinnen, als die bitteren Essentien, in sich fasst, und gleich als im Tode verschlinget“³³. Schwitters hat in Äußerungen über die Entstehung seiner Merzkunst immer wieder einen engen Zusammenhang zu den katastrophalen Zerstörungen des Krieges hergestellt. Und so wird auch bei Böhme die Metapher des drehenden Rades zur Ursache schrecklicher Verwüstungen:

Und so ihn [den Knecht, den „untern Menschen“] dann sein Herr [...] nicht mag bewältigen, gerathen sie miteinander in grosse Angst, Feindschaft, und Widerwärtigkeit, fangen ein drehend Rad an zu machen, sich zu würgen, morden und tödten: [...] davon urständet Krieg, Streit, Zerbrechung Land und Städte, Neid und ängstliche Bosheit, da je einer den andern will todt haben, will alles fressen und in sich ziehen.³⁴

Titelgebendes Element ist in Schwitters' Assemblage das Fragment einer Radnarbe mit drei abgebrochenen Speichen, mithin das Dokument einer Zerstörung. „Man kann auch mit Müllabfällen schreien“, erinnerte sich der Merzkünstler an die Nachkriegszeit, „und das tat ich, indem ich sie zusammenleimte und nagelte“³⁵. Er nannte es sein „Gebet“ über die Wiedererlangung des Friedens. Gleichzeitig hat Schwitters mit der zerbrochenen Radnarbe, die er „Drehrad“ nennt, so etwas wie ein Spielzeug konstruiert. Denn offenbar konnte man sie ursprünglich bewegen. Auf der Rückseite des Bildes ist eine Notiz mit der Überschrift „Gebrauchsanweisung“ angebracht: „Das Drehrad darf von der Stellung, daß die Mitte senkrecht nach unten zeigt nur nach rechts gedreht werden,

³² Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Schriften 1926-1971*, Köln 1973, 286.

³³ Jacob Böhme, *De Incarnatione Verbi, oder von der Menschwerdung Christi*, in: *Sämtliche Schriften*, Bd. 4, 120.

³⁴ Böhme, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 171.

³⁵ Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, Bd. 5, 335.

bis die rechte Speiche senkrecht aufwärts weist. Es ist verboten, das Rad nach links zu drehen. Kurt Schwitters. 5. 5. 1920³⁶. Dass der letzte Satz der „Gebrauchsanweisung“ auch eine politische Pointe beinhaltet, ist wahrscheinlich. Diese Spannung und Ambivalenz zwischen scheinbar albernem Spielerei und wuchtiger Reaktion auf zeitgeschichtliche Aspekte ist wie in der *Ursonate* auch hier zu entdecken.

Am *Bild mit Drehrad*, das 1940 erneut Veränderungen erfuhr, gibt es außer dem Titel weitere „geheimnisvolle“ Besonderheiten. Denn Schwitters hat die für den Betrachter normalerweise unsichtbare Rückseite nicht nur für die schon erwähnte „Gebrauchsanweisung“ und Datierungen genutzt, sondern auch mit verschiedenen Materialien wie Weihnachtspapier und verschiedenen Drucksachen wie Etiketten („Illustret Norsk Familiebibel“) und Reklamen (für Kaffeeersatz) collagiert. Zudem hat er einen auf Weihnachten 1939 datierten Zettel aufgeklebt, auf dem das Spiel „Schlachtschiff“ gespielt wurde. Ist die Vorderseite eine Reaktion auf die demolierte Welt nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg, so erscheint die Rückseite durchaus wie eine ‚spielerische‘ Reflexion der Ereignisse des beginnenden Zweiten Weltkriegs.

Ähnlich wie in seiner *Ursonate* und anderen bedeutenden Werken sind auch bei dieser Assemblage Dinge hinter der sichtbaren Oberfläche verborgen, die zwar für das Werk und seine Geschichte konstitutiv, jedoch auf den ersten Blick unsichtbar, aber vielleicht zu erahnen sind. Anfang März 1927 erinnerte sich Schwitters anlässlich seines Katalogtextes für die *Große Merzausstellung* an eine Rezension im *Cicerone* aus dem Jahr 1920 von Adolf Behne, die einen Grundzug seiner Ästhetik benennt: „KURT SCHWITTERS“, zitiert er fast wortgleich den Kritiker, „gibt uns wieder, was wir lange entbehrten: Geheimnis“³⁷. Das hat Schwitters auf ganz unterschiedliche Weise in seinem Werk verankert.

Schwitters “liked to be called a mystic”

Der englische Kunsthistoriker und Kritiker Herbert Read zollte dem Merzkünstler in seinem Einführungstext zur Londoner Ausstellung in Jack Bilbos *Modern Art Gallery* im Dezember 1944 höchsten Respekt. Er nannte ihn „the supreme master of the collage“ und „one of the most genuine artists in the modern movement“. Vor allem aber hat er die

³⁶ Kurt Schwitters, *Catalogue raisonné I 1905-1922*, bearb. von K. Orchard und I. Schulz, Ostfildern 2000, Kat.Nr. 600, 275.

³⁷ Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, Bd. 5, 250.

mystische Dimension der ausgestellten Arbeiten betont. Schwitters reagierte darauf voller Begeisterung.

Dear Mr. Read!

I thank you very much for being so quick and writing such a marvellous article. I am very happy about it and have been in high spirits ever since it arrived. You certainly observed everything and explained it excellently. I especially appreciate your remarks about the mystic in my work and what you wrote about the 'rejected stone' absolutely expresses my way of feeling and working. I really am very grateful to you.

Yours sincerely, Kurt Schwitters³⁸

Sofort sandte er Reads Text an verschiedene Persönlichkeiten in den USA, von denen er sich weitere Hilfe und Förderung seines Werkes versprach. So schrieb er an Margaret Miller vom New Yorker Museum of Modern Art: „I want to know, whether you know what Herbert Read wrote in my catalogue of the London Exhibition. I sent it to Dr. Barr and Dr. Sweeney. He writes about the mystic very very good. It could not be with more understanding. Please read it“³⁹.

Besonders gut verstanden in seinen künstlerischen Intentionen fühlte sich Schwitters durch eine Passage in Reads Text, die auf jene verborgene Schicht hinweist, über die der Merzkünstler selbst nie gesprochen hat. Read schreibt:

There is of course, a philosophical, even a mystical, justification for taking up the stones which the builders rejected and making something of them, even the headstones of the corner. I doubt if Schwitters would like to be called a mystic, but there is nevertheless in his whole attitude to art a deep protest against the chromium-plated conception of modernism. The bourgeois loves slickness and polish; Schwitters hates them. He leaves his edges rough, his surfaces uneven.⁴⁰

Ein tiefgehendes Misstrauen gegen die mechanisierten, verhärteten (chromium-plated) Erscheinungen einer sich unmenschlich gerierenden Moderne hat bei Schwitters nicht anders als bei den von ihm geschätzten Zeitgenossen wie Hans Arp, Paul Klee oder Wassily Kandinsky ein Potenzial mobilisiert, dem Herbert Read mit Recht (geschichts-)philosophische Gründe attestierte. Er war jedoch unsicher, ob es dem Merzkünstler gefallen würde, als Mystiker bezeichnet zu werden. Read hat

³⁸ Zit. nach Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters*, 343.

³⁹ Diesen Ausschnitt aus einem Brief vom 22. Januar 1947 von Kurt Schwitters an Margaret Miller hat mir freundlicherweise Adrian Sudhalter vom New Yorker MoMA mitgeteilt.

⁴⁰ Herbert Read, „Kurt Schwitters“, 32.

offenbar nicht gewusst, dass die Ursprünge von Merz aus einer Konstellation erwachsen waren, in der mystisches Gedankengut, Texte der großen Mystiker und eine allgemein spürbare Begeisterung für derartige Quellen eine prominente Rolle spielten. Kein Wunder also, wenn Schwitters einer derartigen Charakterisierung seiner Merzkunst ausdrücklich zustimmte. Ein Vierteljahrhundert nach ihrer Entstehung begegnete ihm in Herbert Read ganz unerwartet und auf fremdem Boden ein sensibler und weitsichtiger Kritiker, der Wesentliches seiner Kunst erkannte und vor allem erspürte.

In der Londoner Ausstellung waren 39 Arbeiten von Schwitters zu sehen. Die heute noch erhaltenen Werke zeigen tatsächlich eine bemerkenswerte Verweigerung gegenüber jeder Versuchung, das Vernutzte der Materialien hinter einer blank geputzten Oberfläche verschwinden zu lassen – etwa ein zerbrochener Löffel in *Red wire and half spoon* oder ein poröser Stein in *Anything with a stone*.

Deswegen konnte Read mit Recht von einem tiefgehenden Protest (*a deep protest*) gegen eine Konzeption der Moderne sprechen, die den Verfall der Dinge *nicht* thematisierte, der sich 1944 in Europa unübersehbar auf allen Gebieten manifestierte. Denn auch ein großer Teil der künstlerischen Avantgarden – denen Schwitters ja in den meisten Fällen durchaus freundschaftlich verbunden war – favorisierte ‚moderne‘ Materialien wie Kunststoffe, Stahl und Beton, die jeglichem Verfall zu widerstehen scheinen. Ihre sprichwörtliche Härte war jedenfalls diametral den vom Merzkünstler inszenierten Verfallserscheinungen entgegengesetzt.

Kurt Schwitters widerfuhr gegen Ende seines Lebens etwas ganz und gar Unerwartetes: Der entschiedene Einspruch seiner Merzkunst gegen die haltlosen Fortschrittsversprechen einer illusionären Moderne, die schon der Erste Weltkrieg obsolet gemacht hatte und der Zweite Weltkrieg in die totale Katastrophe führte, wurde als ein künstlerisches Ereignis gewürdigt. In Großbritannien, einem Land, in das er sich vor seinen deutschen Verfolgern hatte retten müssen, und in dem von ihm und seinem Werk kaum jemand etwas wusste, erkannte ein einflussreicher Kritiker einen wichtigen Quell seiner Kunst: die Mystik.

Messianic Endgames in German-Jewish Expressionist Literature

Vivian Liska (University of Antwerp)

Because of its call for a “new humanity” and a collective awakening paired with imagery of destruction, exhortations of ecstatic communality, and a pathos-ridden rhetoric of extremes, German expressionism is considered by some as a premonitory signal if not an outright precursor of later totalitarian movements. Others regarded expressionist imaginings of alternative worlds or renderings of extreme states of mind as an irresponsible flight from the concrete problems of political and social reality. The most famous apology of German expressionist poetry, Kurt Pinthus’ introduction to his legendary collection of poems *Menschheitsdämmerung* (Dawn of Humanity), foresaw these posthumous accusations. In his foreword to the anthology’s 1919 edition, he emphatically asked future readers of these poems to be lenient with the expressionist poets and take into account the situation of crisis out of which they wrote:

You young people, who will grow up as a freer humanity, do not follow them. The poetry of our time is at once an end and a beginning. This future humanity, when it reads the book *Menschheitsdämmerung*, should not condemn the longings of these damned ones, for whom nothing remained but the hope for man and the belief in utopia.¹

A decade after these lines were written, the “hope for man and the belief in utopia” turned into real horror realized in New Humans and New *Reichs*. It is one of the striking paradoxes in modern German cultural history that expressionist art was to be condemned as “degenerate” by one totalitarianism and as “decadent” by another.

In following years, more nuanced distinctions between different modes, contents and forms of expressionist literature have been introduced. The most influential and still widely accepted division stems from

¹ Kurt Pinthus (ed.), *Menschheitsdämmerung. Ein Dokument des Expressionismus*, Hamburg 2000, 32. Unless indicated differently all translations are mine.

the 1970s and distinguishes between a “skeptical” and a “messianic” expressionism.² Skeptical expressionism, characterized by its critical assessment of cultural and social modernization processes and their impact, more particularly the disintegration of autonomous self and a general loss of metaphysical certainties, came to be appreciated as an important participant in modernist literature. Messianic expressionism, by contrast, became both politically and aesthetically disparaged. Its political implications were accused of irrationalism, mystification and – depending on the ideological position of the judgment – of either empty radicalism or an activist and often violent celebration of apocalyptic destruction. Its aesthetic modes were ridiculed for their pathos and exaggeration, their mimicry of archaic or elemental forms as well as their arbitrary syncretism. With the demise of Marxism and an increasing denigration of metaphysically tinged utopias, this negative assessment of messianic expressionism became even more widely accepted and led to scholarly oblivion of this literature. The recent revival of messianic tendencies in political theory, the impact of the cultural turn in literary studies and the current attention paid to German-Jewish literature – more particularly to explorations of the specifically Jewish contribution to modernism – have placed, however, a re-evaluation of messianic expressionism and its religious and cultural underpinnings back on the agenda.

Surprisingly, messianic expressionism has rarely been considered in relation to Jewish thought.³ The disproportionately high participation of Jewish authors in German modernism in general and in expressionism in particular has often been noticed,⁴ but investigations of this phenomenon were for a long time restricted to socio-historical analyses.⁵ Actual explorations of traces of the Jewish tradition in expressionist texts are scarce. An extensive survey of the present state of research on expressionism published in 2008 concludes that expressionist references to Christian motifs have been amply documented whereas the reconstruction of its

² This influential distinction was first introduced in a consistent way by Silvio Vietta and Hans-Georg Kemper, *Expressionismus*, München 1975.

³ Gertrude Cepl-Kaufmann, “Der Expressionismus. Zur Strukturhomologie von Epochenprofil und jüdischer Geisteswelt”, in: Daniel Hoffmann (ed.), *Handbuch zur deutsch-jüdischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Paderborn et al. 2002, 151-84, here p. 161.

⁴ About half of the authors included in the major expressionist anthologies were of Jewish origin. For a description of this phenomenon, see Hans Otto Horch, “Expressionismus und Judentum. Zu einer Debatte in Martin Bubers Zeitschrift ‘Der Jude’”, in: Thomas Anz & Michael Stark (eds.), *Die Modernität des Expressionismus*, Stuttgart-Weimar 1994, 120-41, here 136; Cepl-Kaufmann, “Expressionismus”, 151-84, and Frank Krause, *Literarischer Expressionismus*, Paderborn 2008, 128.

⁵ See: Krause, *Literarischer Expressionismus*, 129.

Jewish legacy still constitutes a desideratum in current scholarship.⁶ This contribution explores existing approaches to this area of research and proposes an alternative path for future investigations which I illustrate with texts by two German-Jewish expressionists, Else Lasker-Schüler and Salomo Friedlaender, better known by his pen-name Mynona.

The Messianic Grotesque

Most existing explanations of the strikingly high participation of Jews to German expressionism focus on socio-historical circumstances such as their cosmopolitanism, their gatherings in café's, clubs and cabarets and their predisposition for a bohemian lifestyle. Their marginalization from mainstream society is seen as the origin of their critical spirit, their exceptional readiness for cultural innovation, their sharpened sense of isolation and alienation of the individual in modernity and their solidarity with the downtrodden.⁷ Occasionally, the Jewish contribution to messianic expressionism is not only explained by pointing at the situation of exclusion, from which the Jewish authors originated, as well as an ensuing sense of urgency for social change. This contribution was also regarded as a modern continuation of the traditional Jewish belief in a redemption that is yet to come.⁸ The desire of Jewish authors to be accepted in the established cultural, intellectual and artistic field is considered by some as the main motivation that led them to secularize this legacy of their ancestors⁹ and to divest it of its Jewish particularism. As a result, many

⁶ Krause, *Literarischer Expressionismus*, 133. See also Cepl-Kaufmann, "Der Expressionismus", 151. Any research looking for elements of the Jewish tradition in German-Jewish expressionism must, however, be careful when positing direct influences on these authors: their actual knowledge of the Jewish tradition was most often limited. It may therefore be more appropriate to speak of analogies between traditional messianic beliefs and the imaginings of these Jewish writers. The two authors to be discussed here, Lasker-Schüler and Friedlaender/Mynona, were to some extent familiar with the Jewish mystical tradition and repeatedly refer to it in their work, but their knowledge was fragmentary and their references to it highly idiosyncratic. Cf. Anya Mali, "Dichtung als Gebet: Mystik und Mystagogie bei Else Lasker-Schüler", in: *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 2, 1989, 146-65; and Detlef Thiel, "Introduction", in: Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona, *Philosophische Schriften*, Vol. 1, Wartaweil 2008, 22.

⁷ See: Armin A. Wallas' afterword to: Armin A. Wallas (ed.), *Texte des Expressionismus. Der Beitrag jüdischer Autoren zur Österreichischen Avantgarde*, Linz-Vienna 1988, 279-96, here 281-2.

⁸ See: Horch, "Expressionismus und Judentum", 29-30.

⁹ Ralf Georg Bogner objects to attempts at tracing continuities between Jewish religious traditions and the writings of expressionist authors of Jewish descent. According to him, these authors wanted "to rebel collectively against the traditions – also the religious ones –

Jewish expressionists addressed humanity with capital letters and over-sized exclamation marks. Participating in what is mockingly called “O Mensch”-poetry, they saw themselves as poet-redeemers of mankind.¹⁰ Recent analyses of this phenomenon link this attitude to universalist ethical tendencies inherent in the Jewish messianic tradition itself.

This ethical component, which is accentuated by recent scholars in an attempt to distinguish the work of Jewish authors from both the apocalyptic, potentially totalitarian radicalism and the heterogeneous spiritualism generally associated with messianic expressionism, is undoubtedly part of the Jewish messianic tradition. There are, however, components and tendencies in this tradition that are no less universalist yet far more controversial. As Gershom Scholem has shown, they are incommensurable with mainstream Jewish ethics referred to in most studies. Scholem, who, most notably in his chapter “Redemption through Sin”, reconstructs the antinomian – transgressive and rebellious – movements in Jewish messianism, points to their anarchist potential and insists that “the revolutionary element, which is part and parcel of the messianic movements, was bound to scare away the bearers of authority”.¹¹ Scholem maintained that these movements, whose main leaders, Sabbatai Zevi (1626-1676) and Jacob Frank (1726-1791) ended up converting respectively to Islam and to Christianity, were nevertheless an intrinsic aspect of Jewish history and a major component on its road to Enlightenment (*Haskalah*). Their blasphemous, ecstatic and often orgiastic heresies were, Scholem believed, “by no means a purely self-destructive force; on the contrary, beneath the

that impregnated their childhood and youth”. In: Ralf Georg Bogner, *Einführung in die Literatur des Expressionismus*, Darmstadt 2005, 47. Bogner’s objection fails to grasp the generational dynamics between the Jewish expressionists and their already largely assimilated Jewish parents. His view that the Jewish authors of this period broke with the beliefs of their parents and rebelled against the religious traditions they were raised with is contradicted by numerous statements by Jewish writers of the period – most famously Kafka – who blame their parents for *not* having transmitted to them *enough* of this tradition. One must nevertheless be careful when searching for elements of the Jewish tradition in messianic expressionism. Since the knowledge of this tradition among Jewish expressionists was often limited, one can hardly detect direct influences. It is more appropriate to speak of analogies between traditional messianic beliefs and the imaginings of these Jewish writers.

¹⁰ A universalist messianism is also seen as the common denominator of many theoretical writings by Jewish authors of the period. Recent scholarship on the Jewish contribution to German expressionism, notably Hans Otto Horch’s pioneer article “Expressionismus und Judentum”, emphasizes this aspect of Jewish expressionism in authors such as Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, Max Brod and others. Horch shows how these authors with otherwise divergent leanings were primarily driven by a concern for the salvation of humanity as a whole.

¹¹ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Tradition in Judaism*, New York 1971, 78-141.

surface of lawlessness, antinomianism, and catastrophic negation, powerful constructive forces were at work".¹² Some works by Jewish expressionists and their alternative modes of imagining redemption are closer to this antinomian tradition that calls for an abrogation of the law and the authority, that implements these laws, than to the ethical messianism and its lofty appeals to mankind invoked in most scholarly analyses of this topic.¹³

This shift in perspective opens up new views on the question whether there is any relation between the *formal* aspects of works by Jewish expressionists and the Jewish tradition.¹⁴ The previously mentioned survey summarizes two existing approaches to this question. One focuses on Jewish contributions to skeptical expressionism and emphasizes their recourse to ironic and humorous poetic modes such as parody or the grotesque in conveying experiences of intense social isolation and alienation. The second approach deals with messianic expressionism, which is associated with literary forms described as "ecstatic, pathetic, voluntaristic or mournful".¹⁵ In this scheme, the Jewish contribution to skeptical expressionism is linked primarily to socio-historical circumstances and conveyed in the mode of irony, humor and the grotesque. Instead, its messianic counterpart, which derives more directly from the Jewish tradition itself, communicates its ethical message through pathos and lament.¹⁶ This division, however, fails to account for some of the aesthetically and ideologically most daring and innovative texts by Jewish expressionists that can be regrouped under the heading of a "messianic grotesque". Numerous texts by authors such as Albert Ehrenstein, Paul Adler, Alfred Lichtenstein and the two authors to be discussed here, Else Lasker-Schüler and Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona, convey messianic visions in an irreverent and provocative clash of incompatibles and display a tendency to the bizarre and the dissonant, to puns and a-grammatical syntax mingling babble and colloquial expressions with suggestions of a mystically inspired power of the poetic word to act on reality. This act is presented as both transgressive and redemptive. It is – in perfect accord with antinomian messianism – redemptive through transgression and the destruction of both poetically and socially dictated rules. While Hans Otto Horch is right in linking Jewish expressionists with the Jewish messianic

¹² Scholem, *Messianic Tradition*, 84.

¹³ A proximity between Jewish messianism and certain forms of anarchist thought has been noticed by individual expressionist thinkers such as the anarchist Gustav Landauer. Cf. Horch, "Expressionismus und Judentum", 123.

¹⁴ See: Krause, *Literarischer Expressionismus*, 130.

¹⁵ Ceppl-Kaufmann, "Expressionismus", 162.

¹⁶ Krause, *Literarischer Expressionismus*, 130-1.

tradition of believing that redemption is possible at every moment, the conclusions he draws from this insight can be carried further. Horch writes that for these authors, “some of what is hoped for at the end of history already occurs in the successful work of art”.¹⁷ In the “messianic grotesque” moreover, the redeemed world is not so much evoked or represented by way of premonitions as the conditions for its advent through transgression, confusion and distortion are performed in the texts themselves.¹⁸

Saving Confusions: Else Lasker-Schüler’s “The Grand Mogul of Philippopel”¹⁹

An example of a messianic grotesque by a Jewish expressionist can be found in one of Else Lasker-Schüler’s poetic prose text in her *The Nights of Tino from Bagdad* published in 1907 and entitled “The Grandmogul from Philippopel”. The story begins like a parodistic fairytale:

The Grand Mogul of Philippopel is sitting in the garden of the Imperial Palace in the City of the Sultan; there comes a strange insect from the West and stings him on the tip of his tongue. He is, indeed, in the habit of letting it rest on his lower lip while he’s thinking. And although the doctors attach no further importance to the mishap, it nevertheless comes to pass, that the exalted lord imagines that he is no longer able to speak.²⁰

The story opens with an incident that is as banal as it is arbitrary and expands into an extravagant parable explicitly called “a grotesque” (*eine Groteske*) in Lasker-Schüler’s manuscript. The principal characters are the Grand Mogul, Minister of the Sultan, and the poetess Tino. The Grand Mogul, who believes that as a result of an insect sting he is no longer able to speak and is urgently needed for the state affairs of the threatened empire, is to be healed by the poetess after the efforts of the doctors and

¹⁷ Horch, “Expressionismus und Judentum”, 131.

¹⁸ In her otherwise remarkable study of the Jewish contribution to German expressionism, Cepl-Kaufmann reduces the function of the grotesque in this literature to a mimetic “mirror” of a world out of joint and an expression of despair “about the times, themselves and art” (*das Leiden an der Zeit, an sich und an der Kunst*). See Cepl-Kaufmann, “Expressionism”, 158.

¹⁹ For a more elaborate discussion of this story, see Vivian Liska, “Saving Confusions. Else Lasker-Schüler’s Poetics of Redemption”, in: *Transversal. Zeitschrift des Centrums für jüdische Studien*, 2, 2006, 43-55.

²⁰ Else Lasker-Schüler, *Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads*, Berlin-Stuttgart-Leipzig 1907, 48.

priests, the wise men, and the guards have proven futile. She is to find the legendary magic word that would restore the minister's speech and thereby save the country. The "wonder-working lips" of the poetess and her erotic love play do indeed cause the Grand Mogul to speak again, but in a language only Tino understands.

Tino becomes the official mouthpiece of the minister and temporarily wins recognition. But she exploits this situation and willfully misrepresents the ruler's intentions: her translations of his words are really *distortions* of his decisions. Through a transformation of his actual decrees she brings about justice and prosperity: She introduces the duty-free import of "spices of foreign lands", invents new, non-violent weapons, and changes "the death sentence on the pack of stray dogs" pronounced by the Grand Mogul into an instruction to build palaces for them. She temporarily wins recognition, at least as long as she is legitimated by the authority of a powerful man and appears to speak in his name. She exploits this situation with subversive intent to achieve political and social changes. Her work at the Imperial Diet (*Reichstagsgebäude*) is, however, brought to an abrupt end: Her deception is discovered in the documents of the Imperial Book and she is driven out of the palace in disgrace. She now roams through the night as a solitary wanderer accompanied by a donkey: "And in the evening we lie under the big face of the moon, my donkey and I, and I read my fate, the engraved pictures of his shaggy hide!"²¹

The poetess Tino, we are told, loses her "own" language as she misrepresents the decisions of the minister; when she finds it again, she is simultaneously exposed. The language she recovers – that is, the language of the story itself – unites three elements: It is a poetic language (she speaks "only in verses now"), it tells of a forbidden love ("Oh Hassan, marvelous Hassan ...") and it is – as substratum of the linguistic distortion of the powerful – the medium of those expelled from the market place, those who represent a threat to the political, social and cultural order of the empire. After the discovery of her deception Tino is driven out of the city. In the concluding scene of "The Grand Mogul of Philippopel" a reference to Jewish Scriptures is superimposed on the oriental background. The final image of the story where the outcast and his donkey wander through the desert suggests a messianic figure whose interpreting of the oracles on the donkey's hide reinforces the impression that Lasker-Schüler has incorporated elements of the Biblical story of Bileam. Bileam, the foreign soothsayer, was appointed by the Moabite king, Balak, to curse the people of Israel. Bileam sets out on his donkey, but turns the curse he

²¹ Lasker-Schüler, *Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads*, 57.

was charged with into a blessing and so saves the Israelites. To the fury of his enemies his prophecies are successful and in turn interrupt the course of history. According to Christian traditions, Bileam is a herald of the Messiah. That Lasker-Schüler was aware of the Bileam legend and equates the function of the Biblical figure with redemption through confusion – in the story a liberating ‘distortion’ – is evident from the correspondences between her 1902 poem “Weltflucht” (Flight from the World)²² and the poem “Elbanaff”,²³ which according to Lasker-Schüler herself represents the “translation” of the former poem into a “mystical Asiatic language”.²⁴

Weltflucht

Ich will in das Grenzenlose
Zu mir zurück,
Schon blüht die Herbstzeitlose
Meiner Seele,

Vielleicht ists schon zu spät zurück,
O, ich sterbe unter euch!
Da ihr mich erstickt mit euch.
Fäden möchte ich um mich ziehen
Wirrurr endend!
Beirrend,
Euch *verwirrend*,
Zu entfliehn
Meinwärts.

Elbanaff

Min salihihi wali kinahu
Rahi hatiman
fi is bahi lahi fassun -
Min hagas assama anadir,

Wakan liachid abtal,
Latina almu lijádina binassre.
Wa min tab ihi
Anahu jatelahu
Wanu *bilahum*.
Assama ja saruh
fi es supi *bila* uni
El fidda alba hire
Wa wisuri - elbanaff!

[Flight from the world

I will go back into the endlessness
Back to myself,
The autumn saffron of my soul already
in bloom,
maybe it is too late already to go back,
Oh, I am dying among you!
As you suffocate me with yourself.

²² Else Lasker-Schüler, *Gedichte 1.1, Werke und Briefe*, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 234.

²³ Else Lasker-Schüler, *Lyrik. Prosa. Dramen 2.1, Werke und Briefe*, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 520-1.

²⁴ The poem “Elbanaff” is preceded by Lasker-Schüler’s comments that her early poems were written in a “primordial language” (*Ursprache*) from the time of Saul, the royal wild Jew: “I still can speak this language which I probably breathed in my dreams. My poem ‚Weltflucht‘ is written in this mystical Asiatic language”. In: “Ich räume auf!”, 350.

I want to spin threads around myself
 Ending the tangle,
Leading astray,
Confusing you,
 To take flight
 Mywards.

(*trans. Esther Kinsky*) [Emphasis mine, VL]

In “Elbanaff”, the “mystical-Asiatic version” of her poem “Weltflucht”, of which only a few semantic particles are comprehensible, the ninth line contains the word “*bilahum*”, which, in the German “translation” is the equivalent of “*Wirrwar*”, confusion or chaos. In the eleventh line “*bila*”, like “*bilahum*”, stands for “confusing”. The eighth line reads “*Anahu jatelahu*”. “*Anahu*” contains the greek root “*ana*”, which, in words like “anagram” and “anastrophe” stands for “re-arrangement, transformation, re-ordering”. “*Anahu jatelahu*” therefore equals “ending the chaos”, that is, ending confusion through – confusion. Like in the Biblical story of the messianic figure “*Bileam*”, redemption comes from the confusing distortion of the language of the oppressors. “*Assama*” in the ninth line of “*Elbanaff*” is the name of an Asian butterfly and evokes the image of the larva, which, in “*Weltflucht*” draws threads around itself. Salvation occurs through the transformation from the larva into a butterfly, the symbol of artistic creation. This correlation reflects both the actions of the poetess *in* the story and *of* the story, both Tino’s “saving” distortions of the oppressor’s decrees and the confusing and thereby redemptive shape of Lasker-Schüler’s story itself. The creative act of confounding the ruler’s normative language contains a promise of messianic redemption. However, this hope is interrupted by the rulers who want to preserve the old *regime* and dismiss the poet, prophet of the new order, who turns into an outcast, a lonely wanderer in the desert.

Redemptive Laughter: Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona’s “The Magic Egg”

A lonely wanderer in the desert is also the protagonist of “The Magic Egg” (*Das Wunder-Ei*),²⁵ an expressionist grotesque by Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona, a philosopher and expressionist author considered to be

²⁵ Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona, “Das Wunder-Ei”, in: *Grotesken*, Vol. I, Wartaweil 2008, 243-8. First published in *Die Schaubühne*, XI, 1915, 138-42.

one of the main authors of the genre of the grotesque (*Groteske*) in early-20th-century German literature. Friedlaender, who used his penname Mynona for his publication of literary texts, wrote numerous by now nearly forgotten grotesqueries as well as unconventional philosophical texts influenced first by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and later – in most unorthodox ways – by Kant. Although his Jewish origins are only rarely apparent in his work, he was interested in Jewish thought²⁶ and associated his love of life (*Lebensfreude*), which he describes as “bordering on satanic wickedness” (*satanische Verruchtheit*) with his Jewishness.²⁷ In his essayistic writings on the grotesque, Mynona describes its dark humor, blasphemous laughter about established norms and purposeful breaking of sexual, social and religious taboos as a means of activating through exaggeration and distortion “the memory of a divine, arcane primal image of true life” (*die Erinnerung an das göttlich geheimnisvolle Urbild des Lebens*), of an “original paradise”.²⁸ The grotesque is, for him, a way of “approaching more closely this situation of the end of times” (*dieser Endzeitsituation mit dem Mittel der Groteske näherzukommen*).²⁹ He imagines the means of reaching paradise – essentially “a heaven in ourselves”³⁰ that also transforms the world – in terms of what he calls, in the title of his main philosophical work, “creative indifference” (*schöpferische Indifferenz*). This notion, which Walter Benjamin borrowed from Mynona in his description of a messianic “universal history”,³¹ suggests the possibility of reconciling polarities and undoing contrasts in a redemptive, non-Hegelian sublation that occurs in and through the creative act, more particularly in the grotesqueries’ parodying distortion of aesthetic and social conventions.

“The Magic Egg”, published in 1915 and repeatedly reprinted in anthologies of expressionist fairytales and literary grotesqueries,³² narrates an episode echoing mythical or Biblical scenes in which a magical or divine apparition singles out a common man and calls upon him to save

²⁶ Lisbeth Exner, *Fasching als Logik. Über Salomo Friedlaender/Mynona*, Munich 1996, 30.

²⁷ Exner, *Fasching als Logik*, 31.

²⁸ Salomo Friedlaender, “Mynona”, in: *Der Einzige*, 27/28, 1919. Quoted in Hartmuth Geerken, *Märchen des Expressionismus*, Darmstadt 1977, 19.

²⁹ See Hartmuth Geerken, “Expressionistisches Märchen”, in: Kurt Ranke *et al.* (eds.), *Enzyklopädie des Märchens. Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*, Vol. 4, Berlin 1984, 697.

³⁰ Geerken, *Märchen des Expressionismus*, 21.

³¹ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 2, Frankfurt am Main 1972, 453. For the importance of Mynona for Benjamin see Uwe Steiner, “The True Politician: Walter Benjamin’s Concept of the Political”, tr. Colin Sample, in: *German Critique*, 83, 2001, 43–68.

³² Karl Otten (ed.), *Expressionismus - grotesk*, Zürich 1962, 84–9; Geerken, *Märchen des Expressionismus*, 138–42.

an otherwise desperate and hopeless situation. In “The Magic Egg”, the would-be savior is the first person narrator and the situation the state of the world itself. The world has, we are told, become an arid desert depleted of vitality, which now ardently awaits its rebirth. Like Lasker-Schüler’s story, Mynona’s starts like a humorous fairytale, though with an even more explicit ironic distance that includes a pun on Lasker-Schüler herself:

Just think! So, think of a giant egg, as big as the St. Peter’s Basilica, the Cologne Cathedral and Notre Dame together. So, think: I, not lazy, wander through the desert, and in the middle of the desert (thirst, camel, white bones in brown-yellow sand, a touch [*eine Messerspitze*] of El-se-las-Kersch-ul-er, caravan, oasis, jackal, cistern, king of the desert-pshuu!) the magnificent giant-egg rises as in a vault from the ground.³³

This egg, which is large enough to contain the major European cathedrals – presumably along with the religious spirituality and Christian devotion they stand for – emerges from the sand like a monstrous ostrich-egg, symbol of rebirth.³⁴ The egg seems at first like a hallucination, a *fata morgana* in the desert, but turns out to be both the riddle and the solution to the universe, the key to its redemption. In these first lines of the story, the desert is evoked in a series of associations including references to an orientalized spelling of Mynona’s fellow poet Lasker-Schüler whom he knew from the Berlin artists’ cafes, mainly the *Café des Westens*, and whom he admired but also repeatedly made fun of.³⁵ The story’s language consists of an odd mixture of Berlin jargon, exaggeratedly refined poetic diction, salacious puns and erudite allusions, most notably to Horace, Nietzsche and the Bible. The plot combines elements of the fairy tale, popular jokes, Biblical stories and motifs taken from diverse literary and philosophical works.

³³ Friedlaender/Mynona, “Das Wunder-Ei”, 243.

³⁴ There are striking similarities between Mynona’s description of the egg and the architectural designs by expressionist architects such as Hermann Finsterlin, Claude Nicolas Ledoux and Hans Scharoun: its huge dimension, its organic shape encompassing traditional forms, its phosphorescence, its disregard for conventional conditions of human dwelling and, most of all, its utopian claims. Cf. Ulrich Schneider (ed.), *Hermann Finsterlin und die Architektur des Expressionismus*, Tübingen-Berlin 1999, especially the drawings 76, 77, 95, 109 in the appendix.

³⁵ See Geerken, *Märchen des Expressionismus*, 396 and Lisbeth Exner, *Fasching als Logik*, 113. In his grotesque “Coffee” written five years after “The Magic Egg”, Mynona mockingly imagines an “amorous encounter” between Lasker-Schüler and the messiah in a cafe. In Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 571-3.

In a semi-comic mode typical of the grotesque, “The Magic Egg” tells the story of a simple man summoned to save the world and his refusal – and subsequent regret – to do so. As he wanders through the desert, the narrator stumbles upon a huge egg. Surprised and intrigued by its uncanny magnitude, he examines the egg more closely and finds two buttons on its surface with which he can make the egg sink into the ground and rise again. After playing with the egg as with a yoyo, he wants to understand its “deeper meaning” and discovers a splice in its shell through which he gleans an inscription on the yolk summoning him to solve the riddle that would transform the desert into a paradisiacal Eden.³⁶ The German word for splice, *Fuge*, signifies both split and seam or joint; running across the whole surface, and even the inside of the egg, it is, in light of Mynona’s idea of “creative indifference”, the perfect site for the annunciation of the possibility to save the universe.

The wanderer enters the egg through an opening in the splice, an obvious sexual allusion. He explores its mysterious, palatial interior and hears a “phosphorescing” announcement that confirms and specifies the prophetic inscription: the salvation of the desert depends on the egg’s destruction. Upon getting outside again after a moment of panic, the wanderer is addressed by a mummified creature sliding out of the egg behind him. It speaks a language, which he has “strangely enough, never heard before, yet understood immediately”. It is “a music without scale”,³⁷ suggesting a language without grammar or syntax, a language of pure immediacy evoking mystical speech. The mummy introduces itself as “the soul of souls” and summons the wanderer whom he calls a “cheeky, mousy, but congenial chap”, a “sublime simpleton”, and who, the mummy insists, has been arbitrarily chosen for this task (*Der Zufall, harmloser Weltling, hat Dich geadelt!*) to save the world by destroying the egg. Unlike in more conventional messianic imaginings, no special election or moral status is needed for this task. The wanderer should perform this act by pushing again on a button on the surface of the egg’s shell. It would then sink towards the middle of the earth, concentrate the forces of fertility contained in it, and, reaching the center of the earth, explode, releasing regenerating powers that would radiate outwards, “towards all the heavens”. For this to happen, the egg – explicitly designated as the

³⁶ “Wanderer in the desert,/ who for the first time sees/ the egg of eggs/ and – (just think!) – rejoices in its sight/ know: that this egg alone can transform the desert into Eden. Iea!/ Now solve the riddle of this egg”. Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 236.

³⁷ Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 237. An editorial note to this passage in Mynona’s story mentions Ferruccio Busoni’s concept of “tonal de-limitation” (*tonliche Unabgegrenztheit*) coined in his *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, Triest 1907.

“principle of fertility” – would have to be “*zur Mitte rein vernichtet und verdichtet*” – literally “purely destroyed and condensed into the middle”.³⁸ That the German word for condensed, “*verdichtet*” also contains “*dichtet*” (create poetry) points to the self-referential dimension of the story: The prefix “*ver*” indicates a transformation, both in terms of “turning into something else” and of “undoing something”, or rather “doing something to excess or wrongly, or to convey the opposite meaning from its root”.³⁹ In this meaning of the prefix “*ver*”, *verdichten* could very well designate the distortions and exaggerations performed by grotesque *Dichtung* and, more particularly, by this grotesque itself.

“The Magic Egg” ends on the refusal of the wanderer to follow the injunction of the mummy. In his fear, even the mummy’s promise that this brave act would lift him out of his insignificance and turn him into a “sublime genius”, a messenger of the divine, does not tempt him. He lets the mummy slide back into the egg, closes its opening and, running off “faster than any camel”, states with ceremonious determination: “The button? I never touched it again”.⁴⁰ The story’s closing lines relate the narrator’s musings about his adventure: While humorously recommending to the reader to look out for the magic egg on his next hunt for Easter-eggs, he draws conclusions in the form of vacillating mock-questions: “Should I (I of all people) have gotten myself into trouble because of a silly mummy?” But also: “Could it be that the salvation of the world depends on a minor matter (*Nebensache*)?”⁴¹ And finally: “Could it be that it takes more guts to bring about an immense collective happiness that is close at hand than to even only fathom an adventurously distant one requiring uncanny dangers? Ask yourself! Just think whether you would, right here and now, bring about redemption to the whole world with nothing more than a gentle pressure of the finger? Wouldn’t you be more scared of this than of one of their readily available martyr-deaths?”⁴²

Mocking Christianity’s belief that salvation occurs through the martyr-death of a messianic savior, Mynona suggests an alternative road to the deliverance of the world. The “gentle pressure of the finger” (*einen leichten Fingerdruck*) could very well be the one guiding the irreverent pen of the author of this grotesque and its own, unconventional messianic action of redeeming the arid desert. Just as a “minor matter” – a magic egg – could

³⁸ This point in the middle is also where, in Mynona’s idea of “creative indifference”, polarities are joined again.

³⁹ See: http://backword.net/german/inseparable_prefixes.html (Viewed: 03.03.2009).

⁴⁰ Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 238.

⁴¹ Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 238.

⁴² Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 239.

encompass all the big cathedrals of Europe along with their religious dogma's and belief-systems, the act of writing a grotesque called "The Magic Egg" can take in – and take on – the messianic task of redeeming the world. Following this logic and pushing the distorting, destructive – and thereby rejuvenating – force of the grotesque to its end, one reaches the point where it not only destroys the traditions of "serious" messianic literature which it parodies, but where it self-destructs in a big explosion of nothing but a mocking laughter that includes laughing about itself. It is with this very laughter that the grotesque purports to partakes in redemption, but a "rest" remains – be it the story itself. Just like the wanderer who refuses to push the apocalyptic button, the author of the story stops short of annihilating his own "Magic Egg". In the last line the narrator admits his regret: He may indeed not have been brave enough to "push the button", but "in his thoughts, secretly", he "often drops a tear on the egg of the desert": "I should, - yes! I should have pushed!"⁴³ The story ends on a semi-ironic note: this tear itself – the awareness of the dismal state of the world – may be a good beginning of watering the desert.

The trail of intertextual allusions running through "The Magic Egg" reveals two main subtexts, one literary, the other Biblical. Right in the middle of the story, a direct quote gives an unmistakable clue: The last words of the apocalyptic prophesy announced to the wanderer while he is caught in the egg ends on "the well-known thesis: 'The desert grows'".⁴⁴ These words taken from the refrain of Nietzsche's dithyrambic poem "Among the Daughters of the Desert" in the final part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* ("The desert grows: woe unto him that harbors deserts"⁴⁵) are an explicit reference to this work pointing to many implicit ones that become recognizable throughout the story. Next to the setting – an oasis in the desert (explicitly named in Nietzsche's poem and in the first lines of Mynona's story) – there are numerous parallels in tone and content: from the burlesque tenor, the sexual innuendoes and the satiric depiction of the lifeless, rational European – the "cloudy, damp, melancholy Old-Europe"⁴⁶ in the wanderer's introduction to Nietzsche's poem and Mynona's mockery of the impulse to call the police for help with the threatening egg, "Ha, Europe must be nicely left out here!"⁴⁷ – to

⁴³ Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 239.

⁴⁴ Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 239.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Stuttgart 1994, 320-5.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 322.

⁴⁷ Friedlaender/Mynona, *Grotesken I*, 139.

individual motifs like the riddle, the camel and the lion, more particularly its “moral roaring” opposed to the laughter provoked by the grotesque, the parody of the Gospel’s episode of the “Temptation in the Desert” down to the exclamation “Eia!” in *Mynona* which is reminiscent of “I-A” in Nietzsche’s “Song of the Ass”⁴⁸ following his “Among the Daughters of the Desert”. Nietzsche’s dithyrambic poems, themselves echoing the Mennipean Satire, are clearly a model for *Mynona*’s own story similarly opposing the Christian “spirit of heaviness” and celebrating vitality and laughter as a means of bringing the desert alive again. But *Mynona* also took his distance from Nietzsche, and the mummy’s summons of the simpleton in “The Magic Egg” can be read as a parody of Zarathustra’s preachings of the superman.⁴⁹

The most extensive reference to Nietzsche’s “Desert”-dithyramb is developed in *Mynona*’s plot itself. The wanderer in Zarathustra tells of his adventures among the “Daughters of the Desert” after having been “swallowed down/ By this the smallest oasis — : — It opened up just yawning, Its loveliest mouth agape by of the most sweet-odoured of all mouthlets: Then fell I right in, Right down, right through — in ’mong you, Ye friendly damsels dearly loved! Selah./ Hail! hail! to that whale, fishlike, If it thus for its guest’s convenience/ Made things nice! — ye well know, surely, my learned allusion?”⁵⁰ The wanderer’s sojourn in the “Magic Egg”, like Nietzsche’s poem, suggests sexual intercourse, but, even more extensively, takes up his “learned allusion”: the Biblical story of Jonah, the reluctant prophet who was swallowed up by a whale after having refused to follow God’s order to announce to the sinful city of Nineveh that it is about to be destroyed if it does not repent. For three days and three nights Jonah languishes inside the fish’s belly, where he repents for his disobedience and is rescued by a merciful God who has the fish vomit out Jonah safely on dry land. Unlike *Mynona*’s wanderer, however, Jonah, after his rescue, obeys the call to prophesy against Nineveh, its inhabitants repent and God forgives them. As a result, modern commentaries consider Jonah, the reluctant prophet, the most effective of all prophets in the entire Bible. *Mynona*’s story lacks the happy and moralizing ending of the Biblical story. Instead, it evokes, in its

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 327-8.

⁴⁹ Steiner: *Mynona*’s “creative principle is unmistakably akin to Nietzsche’s Dionysian will to live, in spite of the characteristic distance from Nietzsche that is maintained. Nietzsche, in Friedlaender’s view, ‘unfortunately’ erred ‘physiologically’ in his conception of the superman [...]. It is ‘no human being,’ nor is it a ‘great human being,’ and by no means a ‘genius’”. In: Steiner, “The True Politician”, 63.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 321.

own grotesque mode, the very different, antinomian *conditions* of redemption and voices the regret for not having “pushed the button”, for not having activated the saving destruction. But this regret itself – *ja, ich hätte drücken sollen!* – and its implication that he will, like Lasker-Schüler's Tino, remain a lonely wanderer in the desert point to the Jewish messianic belief in a redemption that has yet to occur. In the end, the destruction of the egg has not taken place, but the story's subversive laughter along with the narrator's tear – the messianic thought of a world in need of redemption – remains, be it in a diminutive form. It is in this sense that salvation may very well depend on a “minor matter”, an irreverent little tale of a failed salvation of the world, in which the longings for “collective happiness” have been both *vernichtet* and *verdichtet* into an expressionist grotesque entitled “The Magic Egg”.

Lasker-Schüler's and Mynona's stories share many features: a hybrid language, an orientalist scenery, elements of the fantastic and the fairy-tale, a Biblical subtext involving a “problematic” prophet and a linkage of eros, a quasi-mystical language and redemption. Both stories evoke the necessity, possibility – and failure – of a messianic salvation of the world through an act prefigured or performed in their own literary creation, the grotesque disfiguration of the established order. There are, however, notable differences, both in their respective diagnosis of the ills of the world and the sources for their cure: While Lasker-Schüler's story, voiced from the perspective of an outcast, is directed against an oppressive rule, Mynona's counters a world suffering from lack of vitality; Lasker-Schüler's Tino cannot complete her redemptive act because she is expelled by the rulers, while Mynona's protagonist himself refuses to perform the redemptive destruction; In Lasker-Schüler's story salvation rests largely on the power of the word, in Mynona's on the “principle of fertility” and its symbol, the magic egg; Lasker-Schüler evokes the Biblical allusions to the savior and his donkey directly, whereas the reference to the Biblical prophet in Mynona's story is introduced via Nietzsche; Finally, Lasker-Schüler's story, though humorous and even containing traces of the *commedia del arte*, ends on the mournful image of the outcast pondering over his fate, whereas the final tear in Mynona's story – undoubtedly even more playful and even further removed from traditional religious beliefs than Lasker-Schüler's – is nothing but a semi-ironic afterthought. All these differences point to a divergence in the sources from which the two stories draw their opposition to the existing order: While Tino's gesture, including the messianic interpretation of the Bileam figure, has Christian

undertones, Mynona's "Magic Egg" refers to a pagan world view.⁵¹ These different subtexts crossing the references to the Jewish messianic tradition are undoubtedly symptoms of the syncretism prevalent everywhere in expressionist literature, but this recourse to foreign traditions also echoes the transgression of religious and cultural delimitations to be found in Jewish antinomian messianism,⁵² whose manifold manifestations in modernist literature remain to be explored.⁵³

⁵¹ These differences can also be traced back to personal and temporal origins: Lasker-Schüler's story, which narrates and performs an act of subversion against oppressive powers, considers the necessity of redemption from the perspective of a female poet, a woman in a world ruled by a powerful patriarchy. This rebellion against the reigning order – a rebellion that fails because of the victim's powerlessness – is absent from Mynona's story. Furthermore, "The Magic Egg", unlike Lasker-Schüler's "The Grandmogul of Phillipopol", was written after the onset of World War I, which could explain the "savior's" reluctance to "push the button" of apocalyptic destruction.

⁵² While Scholem, who believed in an autonomous Jewish history, maintained that antinomian messianism was merely *analogous* to other – mainly Christian – beliefs, recent scholarship more interested in transcultural processes demonstrates the actual intermingling of the different faiths and traditions. Cf. the chapter "Sabbatean Syncretism", in: David Ruderman, *The Transformation of Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe: An Interpretation*, New Jersey (forthcoming in 2010).

⁵³ A focus on the antinomian tendencies and their literary forms opens up another possibility of situating the topicality of messianic expressionism. Antinomian messianism plays a major role in the political, aesthetic and philosophical writings of Giorgio Agamben, one of the cult figures in recent theory. In his work inspired by Walter Benjamin, the notion of playing with the law, which he calls "profanation", participates in an anarchic and potentially messianic resistance against the powers responsible for the dismal state of the world. The mischievous endgames in Jewish expressionism suggested here are in accord with such profanations. They possibly go a step further: they play with messianism itself.

“Here I am at home – here I am in a foreign land”.
Multilingualism, Modernism and (De)territorialization
in the Works of the Finland-Swedish Writer
Elmer Diktonius

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Literary multilingualism, by which I here refer to the use of more than one language in a text, is a central characteristic of much modernist literature.¹ Perhaps especially prominent in the works of expatriates or writers in exile such as Beckett, Celan, Eliot and Joyce, it is also an integral part of the Finland-Swedish modernist Elmer Diktonius' (1896-1961) writings. In this article, I suggest that Diktonius' literary multilingualism can be seen as a key to understanding the link between aesthetics and politics in his works. I discuss Diktonius' multilingualism from two related perspectives. The first concerns how multilingualism functions as a modernist feature. The second links literary multilingualism to Gilles Deleuze's thoughts on *minor literature*, as developed in cooperation with Félix Guattari. By combining Diktonius' multilingualism with Deleuzian notions of *territoriality*, I would like to take the concept of minor literature on a journey from Prague-German to Finland-Swedish surroundings. I argue that this can lead to new perspectives on the workings of language mixing in Diktonius' texts and I am especially interested in minor literature as a concept which can help focus on the link between aesthetics and politics in Diktonius' writings.

Elmer Diktonius is regarded as one of the most important of the first wave of Finland-Swedish modernists who burst forth on the literary scene at the end of the 1910s and the beginning of the 1920s. Diktonius had originally planned to become a composer, but made his literary debut in

¹ Gerald Gillespie declares that “multilingualism often is an indispensable attribute of High Modernist poetry and narrative” in contrast to 20th-century drama, that “as a public medium is relatively more resistant to unassimilated pieces of foreign speech”. See: Gerald Gillespie, “Multilingualism in the High Modernist Novel and Poem”, in: Manfred Schmeeling and Monika Schmitz-Emans (eds.), *Multilinguale Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg 2002, 52.

1921 with a collection of aphorisms and poems at a small communist publishing house in Sweden.² In 1920-21 and 1925-26, he lived on the continent, leading a bohemian life in Paris, London and Cornwall, spending time with leftist radicals and intellectuals and, according to himself at least, starving. During his whole life, mostly spent in and around Helsinki and in the Finnish countryside, he made a meagre living writing literary criticism and articles. He also worked as a translator from English and Finnish, introduced American and European modernist poetry in Finland and was a source of inspiration for younger modernist writers from Sweden. Today he is mostly remembered as a poet, but he also published a short expressionist novel, a couple of collections of short stories, an idyll, and prose fragments.

Diktonius was a Swedish-Finnish bilingual and several scholars have remarked on the *Finnishness* of his Swedish, especially in the idyll *Onnela* (1925), his first work of prose, and in the novel *Janne Kubik. Ett träsnitt i ord* (1932).³ Diktonius' first biographer Olof Enckell, for example, labels *Onnela* "Finnish, unmistakably and solely Finnish",⁴ and his latest biographer, Jörn Donner, calls it Diktonius' most Finnish book.⁵ And while one critic argues that the innovative style of *Janne Kubik* is a result of its having been thought out in Finnish,⁶ others disagree, saying that what is written in Swedish must have been thought in Swedish.⁷ In his work on Diktonius, George C. Schoolfield explains the novel's "untranslatability" as a result of its Finnishness, which is rooted in both language and theme.⁸

² In a conference paper on Diktonius' bilingualism as a social asset, Kristina Malmio emphasizes the importance of Diktonius' Finnish-speaking acquaintances in helping him find a publisher. (Kristina Malmio, *Bilingualism – a form of cultural and social capital in early 20th century Finland? The case of the author Elmer Diktonius*, held: *Cultures in Translation, Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication NIC 2008*, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, 4-6 December 2008.)

³ Elmer Diktonius, *Onnela. Finsk idyll* (Onnela. Finnish idyll), Helsingfors 1925, and *Janne Kubik. Ett träsnitt i ord* (Janne Kubik. A Wood-Cut in Words), Helsinki 1932. The English translations of titles by Diktonius are, if no attribution is given, by George C. Schoolfield (from his *Elmer Diktonius*, Contributions to the Study of World Literature 10, Westport-London 1985).

⁴ "finsk, omiskännligt och uteslutande finsk"; Olof Enckell, *Den unge Diktonius*, Stockholm 1946, 240f.

⁵ Mårten Westö, "Sprakande eld, slocknande brasa", interview with Jörn Donner, in: *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 26 August 2007.

⁶ Thomas Warburton, *50 år finlandssvenska litteratur*, Helsinki 1951.

⁷ Tapani Ritamäki, "Trettioalets misärskildringar", in: Clas Zilliacus (ed.), *Finlands svenska litteraturhistoria II*, Helsinki-Stockholm, 123-30.

⁸ Schoolfield, *Diktonius*, 141. Schoolfield (108) also deems *Onnela* "well-nigh impossible" to translate into any other tongue.

Donner, in turn, puts forth the hypothesis that Diktonius' linguistic ingenuity could be a consequence of his linguistic insecurity, which in its turn would stem from his bilingualism.⁹ In my opinion, the traces of Finnish and other languages in Diktonius' texts are more profitably explored as integral elements, aesthetically and politically, of the texts. And the effects of literary multilingualism are not dependent upon the intent of the author, even if the rebellious Diktonius most likely wanted to shock his readers on several levels. In the following, I will examine the effects of multilingualism in the poem "Kärleksfantasi till havet"¹⁰ (Love-Phantasy to the Sea) as well as in *Janne Kubik* and *Onnela*.

Modernist Multilingualism

Diktonius himself claimed that the Finnish language is too soft and that only the most virile of men can make a man out of it.¹¹ Swedish, on the other hand, is filled with clusters of virile consonants.¹² It is not only the concentration of consonants, but also how they are situated in the body, that differs. Finnish consonants, claims Diktonius, are uttered inside the mouth. Swedish consonants, in contrast, emerge from a hairy chest and resonate deep in the pit of the stomach.¹³ Apparently, this virility, which is linked to the harshness of the language, is needed in order to write modernist poetry. Still, many of Diktonius' literary idols wrote in Finnish, foremost among them the first Finnish language novelist Aleksis Kivi. But these Finnish role-models were not modernists. And what is more interesting, despite his gendered "tongue ties" and his choice of Swedish as a literary medium,¹⁴ Diktonius still seems to need Finnish (as well as fragments of other languages) in his writing. And in his prose he often puts Finnish to use when dealing with the topic of men and masculinity.

In Diktonius' poetry, occasional English words are sometimes used to highlight cosmopolitan or foreign surroundings, for example in the poem

⁹ Jörn Donner, *Diktonius – ett liv*, Stockholm 2007, 255.

¹⁰ Elmer Diktonius, "Kärleksfantasi till havet", in: *Taggiga lågor* ["Barbed flames"], Helsingfors 1924, 82-91.

¹¹ Elmer Diktonius, "Muualla ja meillä", in: *Ultra*, 2, 1922, 24-5.

¹² Elmer Diktonius, "Umajärven kumpareilta", in: *Näköala. Suomen kirjallisuuden vuosikirja*, 2, 1949, 284.

¹³ Diktonius, "Umajärven kumpareilta", 284.

¹⁴ Diktonius did write poems and articles in Finnish throughout his career and also translated *Janne Kubik* into Finnish as *Janne Kautio* in 1946. However, the books of poetry and prose that he published were in Swedish.

"London", where the market women cry "Strawberrys [sic]" and the lyrical self informs the reader that "china" means "opium".¹⁵ London place names also add to the hectic, urban key of the poem. In the last poem of the suite "Kärleksfantasi till havet" it is the name of a bird that is foreign:

Kormorent, kormorent
svarta fågel!
– jag vett [sic] ej ditt namn
på mitt modersmål.
[...]¹⁶

[Kormorent, kormorent
black bird!
– I don't know your name
in my mother tongue¹⁷]

"Kormorent" is a misspelling of the English bird name "cormorant", whose much less poetical Swedish name "skarv" the lyrical self does not know. The foreign bird name stands as a link between the literal distance from the homeland that the lyrical self experiences in Cornwall and a (partial) exile from the mother tongue that is made visible in the foreign environment at the sight of the bird. The lyrical self then declares: "I too have my kormorents/ [...] black birds with jarring names/ and hoarse cries –". He also calls the cormorant a "holy animal".¹⁸ These lines can be read as an expression of strangeness felt by the subject in regard to parts of himself. As Anders Olsson has pointed out, a sense of *inner exile* is a crucial characteristic of much European modernism.¹⁹ In a sense the idea of inner exile, or estrangement from one's surroundings or parts of oneself, relies on the notion of a complete but complex subject. With Diktonius, the lyrical self is estranged from parts of himself but at the same time he is "invulnerably whole inside".²⁰ He compares himself to the great Atlantic – they both experience foreignness and have parts that are strange, in motion, and holy. Olsson has pointed out the explosive force

¹⁵ Elmer Diktonius, "London", in: *Taggiga lågor*, 45-53.

¹⁶ Diktonius, "Kärleksfantasi", 89.

¹⁷ Translation by J.T.

¹⁸ "[...] Även jag har mina kormorenter / [...] svarta fåglar med skorrande namn / och hessa skrin – [...]". Diktonius, *Taggiga lågor*, 90.

¹⁹ Anders Olsson, "Exile and Literary Modernism", in: Mats Jansson, Jakob Lothe and Hannu Riikonen (eds.), *European and Nordic Modernisms*, Norwich 2004, 37-50.

²⁰ Diktonius, *Taggiga lågor*, 87.

of the sea in this poem, where the self is blown apart but at the same time enters a higher unity.²¹ A holy, fleeting strangeness is signalled by the cormorant.

Of course, we may note that the elevation of the cormorant to holy animal is facilitated by the exoticism of its name – for a Swedish reader, it would perhaps be difficult to accept a “skarv” as a holy bird. But even so, Diktonius’ use of a foreign and misspelled name is interesting. The ignorance of a word, the entry of a foreign word on the written page, sets off an exploration of a *Verfremdung* from the mother tongue, or, rather, the mother tongue’s distance from the lyrical self, and not least a sense of inner exile. The bird’s jarring name, the jarring of foreign syllables in the mouth makes one’s own mother tongue jar.

Multilingualism, however, is much more common in Diktonius’ prose than in his poetry. In his prose, Diktonius most often deals with life in Finland, and life in *Finnish*. The motif of the novel *Janne Kubik* is Finland before and after the country gained its independence in 1917, as experienced by the good-for-nothing Janne. He works at the docks, stabs a rival over a girl, fights on the workers’ side in the Civil War of 1918, ends up in a prison camp, smuggles alcohol and takes part in the political kidnappings routinely organized by the Finnish right wing, among other things. The highly lyrical, musical, yet consonant-flooded prose of the novel is crammed with Finlandisms,²² everyday speech, profanities and slang, as well as fragments of different languages. In some cases it is English or Russian, in others Finnish, that break the Swedish surface. Actual Finnish words are used quite sparingly. The most prominent ways in which Finnish is present in the text is through Finnish-influenced words, unidiomatic expressions, a strange use of prepositions, as well as syntactically.²³

Janne Kubik is a novel about a nation – a nation built of men, it would seem. In constructing an image of the Finnish man as hard at work, drinking and engaging in violent behaviour, Diktonius contributes to a literary tradition that was formed as early as the 19th century and in which

²¹ Anders Olsson, “Jagets maskspel i Diktonius lyrik”, in: *Gudsöga, djävulstagg. Diktoniusstudier. Skrifter från Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland* 619, ed. Agneta Rahikainen, Marit Lindqvist and Maria Antas, Helsingfors 2000, 72.

²² That is, Swedish words or expressions mostly or only used by Swedish-speakers in Finland and not in Sweden. Some Finlandisms are Fennicisms, i.e. words of Finnish origin, some Russicisms, i.e. of Russian origin: many are of Swedish origin.

²³ More examples of multilingualism in *Janne Kubik* are given in Julia Tidigs, “Upplösta språkgränser? Flerspråkighet i Elmer Diktonius *Janne Kubik*”, in: Clas Zilliacus (ed.), *Gränser i nordisk litteratur/Borders in Nordic Literature* 2, IASS XXVI 2006, Åbo 2008, 685-92.

Kivi is an important figure. The word *puukko*, a type of knife, is the Finnish word used most often in the text. Second most frequent are words having to do with *perkele*, a strong Finnish swear-word whose original meaning refers to the devil. These words function as markers of Finnish life in both *Janne Kubik* and in the idyll *Onnela*.

Code-switching to English is also used to highlight the central theme of *Janne Kubik*. In the final chapter, the English helmsman of the ship where the strike-breaker Janne falls down and dies, cries out “This damned country” – not once, but twice.²⁴ He also shouts “damned fool” and “to hell” with all the Finnish workers.²⁵ The helmsman’s distinctive voice is unusual in the novel. The theme of nationality is here being foregrounded by the presence of the voice of a foreigner, who damns Finland. But the words are also a reminder that this country is damned by the swearing Finns who inhabit it.

As the next example shows, Russian is also present in the text. In the following quote, it is introduced in the fragmented speech of a Russian soldier trying to inform some Finnish soldiers in the Red Guard about the fall of the city of Tammerfors (Finnish: *Tampere*) in the Civil War:

Ajaj Tammerfors! – inga Tammerfors, skjuta bombom, Tammerfors brinna, vita Tammerfors, röda springa, skjuta, springa, vot väldiga högar döda, såhär höga, man och kvinna och lilla pojke död – Tammerfors kaputt. Panimajte paschalusta: kaputt! Röda springa, vita efterspringa, jag skida-skida, anarkistbataljon kaputt, alla heroj kaputt, jag skida natt och dag, dag och natt, inga äta mata, inga dricka vatten, vot här, slut, ajaj kaputt. Revolutsija och Rossija – allt långt borta, kaputt.²⁶

[Owow Tammerfors! – non Tammerfors, shoot boomboom, Tammerfors burn, whites Tammerfors, reds run, shoot, run, vot giant heaps dead, this high, man and woman and little boy dead – Tammerfors kaput. Panimajte paschalusta: kaput! Reds run, whites afterrun, I ski-ski, anarchist battalion kaput, all heroj kaput, I ski night and day, day and night, no eat fod, non drink water, vot here, finished, owow kaput. Revolutsija and Rossija – all long gone, kaput.²⁷]

The infusion of somewhat carelessly transcribed Russian words – and German, if we count *kaput* – into an agrammatical Swedish, which in turn “represents” Finnish, can be read in different ways. In one way, it is an imitation of broken speech, informing us about the language situation

²⁴ Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 151, 155.

²⁵ Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 154f.

²⁶ Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 71.

²⁷ Translation by J.T.

among the Red soldiers – the Finnish and Russian members of the Red Guard did not speak each other's languages well. But the reader has to be cognizant of the historical context in order to discover that the text's Swedish "really" means Finnish.

It could easily be assumed that the insertion of Finnish into a Swedish text with Finnish-speaking characters is an authenticating and realist strategy. Although multilingualism can have a mimetic *effect*, this kind of multilingualism clearly is an *aesthetic* strategy.²⁸ Often it works as a synecdoche, where one word marks an entire dialogue as "really" going on in another language. Even in the example above, it is not a case of extreme realism – Swedish is only present in the text, not in the story, where the character is speaking Finnish. In effect, a *gap* between text and narrated world is created. And Diktonius' multilingualism is not limited to dialogue, of which he actually wrote rather little. The Swedish of the narrator, whose voice is often indistinguishable from that of the protagonist, is often affected by Finnish, and Diktonius invents many neologisms.

A reading of *Janne Kubik* that focuses on mimetic aspects only would neglect language-mixing as a way of making the prose resonate – for it to become poetic and musical, even if it is staccato. The contrapuntal mixing of Russian and agrammatical Swedish provides a path of escape from automatized language, as do the strands of non-standard language and the mixing of different kinds of language in other parts of the text. It results in a strange Swedish, whose effects of surprise sharpen the reader's senses. This Swedish ignores the demands for linguistic purity that were put forth with increasing eagerness in early 20th-century Finland. In the novel's preface, the writer informs us that what he has written is a variation on what the great modern novelists have written out there in the wide world.²⁹ However, their "sweet harmonies" have turned into a "hideous echo".³⁰ But that, he explains, is what happens to prose that "grows out of the barren Finnish earth".³¹ By infusing his Swedish with Finnish, Finland-Swedish regionalisms and slang etc., Diktonius has created a *Finnish* modern(ist) novel in Swedish. And the Finnishness of the text is

²⁸ See: Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It Sleep. The Languages of Jewish-American Literature*, Princeton-Oxford 2006, 37.

²⁹ "en anspråkslös och fåtonig variation över de upplösnings- och omdaningstemat, vilka den moderna romanens store spelat på sina skrivmaskiner ute i den vida världen", Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 6.

³⁰ "ljuva harmonier", "det anskrämliga eko", Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 6.

³¹ "[...]ur den karga finska jorden framvuxna prosa[...]", Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 6.

connected to the earth, to the territory. Of course, this non-beauty is what Diktonius strove for – not the reified beauty of realist literature.

(De)territorialization

As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, the avant-garde multilingualism of Diktonius' texts can also be viewed in terms of *minor literature* and *territoriality*.³² For Deleuze and Guattari, the word minor has a multiplicity of meanings in this context. It describes the literature of a minority writing in a major language, such as German speaking Jews in Prague or speakers of Swedish in Finland. Minor here means not only small in terms of numbers or range of territory. It also means 'under-aged': not being the one who sets the (language) rules. Minor literature is characterized both by a coefficient of deterritorialization (i.e. a centrifugal, anti-structuralizing tendency) and by its collective and political nature.³³

In the early 1900s, there was a growing concern in Finland that the varieties of Swedish in Sweden and Finland were veering apart up to the point where Finland-Swedish would become difficult for Swedes to understand. Apart from practical consequences, there were racist and nationalist aspects to this – it was feared that the Finland-Swedes would lose touch with their Swedish brethren and risk assimilation into the Finnish speaking majority. Linguistically, the threat was seen as coming from regionalisms, Finnish and, especially before 1917, Russian. Literature came to be the most cherished of Finland-Swedish arts and its vitality was considered a sign of the linguistically defined Finland-Swedes' viability.³⁴ The writer was given the task of writing *proper* Swedish. In other words, the deterritorialization of Swedish in Finland was to be countered with re-territorialization.

A literature or language is not minor *per se*; it is minor in a specific socio-linguistic context. Swedish in Finland is perhaps minor when compared to Swedish in Sweden. At the same time, there is a Finland-Swedish standard that can function as a *major* language locally, in relation to Finland-Swedish dialects or sociolects. While purists promote centri-

³² Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*, Paris 1975; Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Milles Plateaux. Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, Paris 1980. First developed in their book on Kafka, "literature mineure" is a translation of the German "kleine Literatur".

³³ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, Minneapolis & London 1986, 16f.

³⁴ See: Clas Zilliacus, "Finlandssvensk litteratur", in: Zilliacus (ed.), *Finlands svenska litteraturhistoria II*, 13-8.

petal, reterritorializing tendencies, the intense collective and political value assigned to Finland-Swedish literature is a sign of its possibility to be(come) minor. I speak of possibility, since becoming minor is only one of several possibilities. Clas Zilliacus has suggested three ways in which the Finland-Swedish writer can respond to the deterritorialization of his language. Firstly, he can choose to *conceal* the so-called poverty of Finland-Swedish through a selection of modes, genres etc. Secondly, he can try to *cure* the illness of deterritorialization by adhering to purist language norms. And thirdly, he can *make a virtue* of deterritorialization by putting it to artistic use.³⁵ For: first and foremost, minor literature is a question of *use*.³⁶ It is a kind of “linguistic action”,³⁷ “particular ways in which literature does political work”.³⁸ It is a way of inhabiting a language.

As Deleuze and Guattari say, the writer has to “be a sort of stranger *within* his own language”.³⁹ “To be a foreigner, but in one’s own tongue, not only when speaking a language other than one’s own. To be bilingual, multilingual, but in one and the same language, without even a dialect or patois”.⁴⁰ And in the essay “He stuttered”, Deleuze further emphasizes that creating minor literature is *not* a question of multilingualism:

This is not a situation of bilingualism or multilingualism. We can easily conceive of two languages mixing with each other, with incessant transitions from one to the other; yet each of them nonetheless remains a *homogenous system in equilibrium*, and their mixing takes place *in speech*. But this is not how great authors proceed, even though Kafka is a Czech writing in German, and Beckett an Irishman (often) writing in French, and so on. They do not mix two languages together, not even a minor language and a major language, though many of them are linked to minorities as a sign of their vocation. What they do, rather, is invent a minor use of the major language within which they express themselves entirely. [... A great writer] is a foreigner in his own language: he does not mix another language with his own language, he carves out a nonpreexistent foreign language within his own language. He makes the language itself scream, stutter, stammer, or murmur.⁴¹

³⁵ Zilliacus, “Finlandssvensk...”, 16.

³⁶ See: Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London 1987, 103f; John Hughes, *Lines of Flight. Reading Deleuze with Hardy, Gissing, Conrad, Woolf*, Sheffield 1997, 57.

³⁷ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, London-New York 2003, 91.

³⁸ Scott Spector, *Prague Territories. National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka’s Fin de Siècle*, Berkeley-London 2000, 27.

³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 26.

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 98.

⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze, “He stuttered”, in: *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Minneapolis 1997, 109f, my emphasis.

What is one to do with a passage like this, when trying to treat multilingualism as a possible minorization of literature? Deleuze here seems to be saying that literary multilingualism is not a way of becoming minor, and that the difference between traditional and multilingual literature is simply that the latter involves two or more stable language systems.

Well, one point in the above passage relates to use. As Deleuze and Guattari point out in *Milles Plateaux*, becoming minor is a possible *treatment* of language.⁴² A minor language is perhaps particularly suited for a minor usage, but it is certainly not enough to be a writer from Finland writing in the Swedish language, or to be a writer of texts with Swedish and Finnish in them. It is not the simple presence of languages that matters, it is the use that is being made of them and how this use connects with the world of which this literature is a part.

And there is in fact literary multilingualism that does *not* constitute or preserve “each language as a homogeneous system in equilibrium”.⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari say: “The atypical expression constitutes a cutting edge of deterritorialization of language”.⁴⁴ As Diktonius’ prose shows, an efficient way of creating such atypical expressions is letting your “own” language be influenced by another, just as the strangeness of Kafka’s German to a certain extent relates to its influence from Czech.⁴⁵ I do not hesitate to call this sort of syntactic, semantic or other kinds of influence multilingualism,⁴⁶ and it is a crucial aspect of Diktonius’ *style*. Diktonius’ texts become minor in Swedish, but also through their relationship with Finnish, Russian or English, even if it is does not happen in the same way with each language. Swedish in *Onnela* and *Janne Kubik* does not survive these encounters with other languages intact and in equilibrium.

In the case of Diktonius, it is impossible to distinguish between his “own” and a “foreign” language. Swedish was his mother’s tongue and

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 103.

⁴³ Deleuze, “He stuttered”, 109.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 99.

⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari refer Klaus Wagenbach on the influence of Czech on Prague German and mention for example “the incorrect use of prepositions; the abuse of the pronominal; the employment of malleable verbs (such as *Giben*, which is used for the series “put, sit place, take away” and which thereby becomes intensive)”; Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 23.

⁴⁶ As do, sometimes in other words, for example Gary D. Keller (“The Literary Strategems [sic] Available to the Bilingual Chicano Writer”, in: Francisco Jiménez (ed.), *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, New York 1979, 263-316), Hana Wirth-Nesher (“Between Mother-Tongue and Native Language: Multilingualism in Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep*”, in: *Prooftexts*, 10, 1990, 297-312), and Doris Sommer (*Bilingual Aesthetics. A New Sentimental Education*, Durham-London 2004).

foremost among his literary languages, but his ties to Finnish were strong and intimate. In any case, Deleuze and Guattari also claim that literature, in one sense, is an event of “decomposition or destruction of the maternal language”.⁴⁷ And the statement about the writer always being a stranger in a language, “even if this is his native tongue”,⁴⁸ does not seem to preclude the writer from moving as a stranger in a foreign language, or in a partially foreign or even partially “own” language. When can we ever be said to own a language? When can we encircle a language so that we can define it as completely foreign or completely known to us? When Diktonius’ Swedish becomes foreign through the remembrance of Finnish, when the absence-presence of Finnish informs his style, is he not being a sort of stranger within his own language?

Diktonius makes a virtue of the poverty and variation of Finland-Swedish in relation to other languages, as well as its dependence upon other languages. As Zilliacus points out, *Janne Kubik* knows what two languages, Finnish and Swedish, know.⁴⁹ With the concept of minor literature in mind, the previous quote from *Janne Kubik* can be viewed in a different light. The mixing of languages makes for a kind of language where the communicational or representational aspect is challenged by the expressional. Swedish is perforated by other kinds of language. The mixing, incorrectness and misspellings actualise the fact that language is first and foremost spoken and in variation. This can indeed be viewed, one might say, as being a case where the writer is “mak[ing] use of the polylingualism of one’s own language”.⁵⁰ As in the example with the Russian soldier, language turns into music and its meaning risks taking flight. This potential is also displayed “monolingually” early on in the novel when Janne toys with the word “revolution” until it turns into asignifying fragments – “Re, re, revo. Re, revo.”⁵¹ The word is made to “vibrate around itself”, to speak with Deleuze and Guattari.⁵² Finally it materializes as an animal, a poor beast.⁵³ These are deeply *political* events. When power relations are encoded and acted out through standard language, the challenging of standard language, and of the *meaningfulness* of language, inevitably implies a challenge of those power relations.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and Life”, in: *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 5.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, “He stuttered”, 109.

⁴⁹ Zilliacus, “Finlandssvensk”, 16.

⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 27.

⁵¹ Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 14.

⁵² Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 21.

⁵³ Diktonius, *Janne Kubik*, 15.

⁵⁴ See: Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 101.

In Diktonius' idyll *Onnela*, Finnish words and literal translations help to explore notions of Finnishness and territoriality. The title is the Finnish name of the place described in the text, meaning *locus amoenus*. The power of the earth is declared early on: "The blood is thicker than the water, but strongest are you, barren earth".⁵⁵ The book focuses on the love-hate relationship between the narrator and a territory and its people: "Here I am at home – here I am in a foreign land".⁵⁶ More prominent than in *Janne Kubik* is Diktonius' use of onomatopoeia, with distinctly Finnish-sounding exclamations and interjections like "hau-hau" (a dog's bark), "fyi-fyi", "ajjai", "tako-tako", "päkä-päkä" and "oijoj". The words' connection to the mouths of Finnish speakers is retained through orthography.

One example of Finnish making Swedish foreign in *Onnela* is a description of the wilds of inner Finland. In it are two words; *bakland* (back land, back country) and *hjärtland* (heartland), which are Swedish neologisms but known expressions in Finnish (*takamaa*, *sydänmaa*).⁵⁷ But use of these kinds of words is typical of Diktonius' way of making Swedish vibrate with the ghost of another language. (One can only imagine what *Onnela* looked like before Diktonius' publisher corrected 600 "language errors" and Fennicisms.⁵⁸) Diktonius evokes other languages *without* breaking any grammatical rules or switching to another language. As Ronald Bogue makes clear: "A minor usage of language, then, may manifest itself through direct violations of linguistic norms and rules, but also by more indirect means that leave basic conventions intact".⁵⁹ When viewed as Finland-Swedish literature, this subtle multilingualism is the deterritorialization of Swedish taken further, creating aesthetic effects and a temporary escape from the clutch of established territorialities. Diktonius also manages to write a Finnish text in Swedish, creating new links between narrative language and narrated territory.

At the same time as it deterritorializes, this multilingualism, however, in a sense also *reterritorializes*. Literary texts are never entirely major or minor – even minor texts usually have many representational elements in them. Diktonius still relies on nationalist and stereotypical assumptions about the Finnish people – "puukko" and "perkele" – and even romanticizes them, and in so doing performs a kind of reterritorialization.

⁵⁵ "Blodet är tjockare än vattnet, men starkast är du, karga jord", Diktonius, *Onnela*, 9. The use of definitive article here is atypical in Swedish as well as in English.

⁵⁶ "Här är jag hemma – här är jag i främmande land", Diktonius, *Onnela*, 31.

⁵⁷ Diktonius, *Onnela*, 55.

⁵⁸ Donner, *Diktonius – ett liv*, 151.

⁵⁹ Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, 103.

The use of Finnish is also a way of grounding his text in Finnish soil. This also constitutes a kind of reterritorialization in relation to Finnish language literature – Finland can also be written in Swedish. But by being written in a Fennicized Swedish rather than in Finnish, however, the texts are prevented from being totally submerged in this domestic soil. Language mixing also creates tensions by fusing together different languages, each imbued with different nationalist connotations.

Conclusion

The readings of Diktonius' multilingualism as avant-garde and as minor literature should, in fact, be linked to each other. As Bogue suggests: "It is through the concept of a minor usage of language that Deleuze and Guattari bring together the linguistic inventions of a minority inhabiting a majority's tongue and the experimentations with language of the modernist avant-garde".⁶⁰ The minority and the modernist writers are not necessarily one and the same, but in Diktonius' case they are. And the link between avant-garde and minor literature makes visible the political character of modernism. For Deleuze and Guattari, language is fundamentally social. "Forming grammatically correct sentences is the prerequisite for any submission to social laws".⁶¹ Regarding Diktonius, the reading of his texts in terms of minorization and territoriality is able to show how the political aspect of the texts is not only anchored in themes etc., but is an intrinsic consequence of his *style*.

Diktonius' multilingualism at least temporarily releases him from the restraints of a desperately reterritorializing Finland-Swedish literature when the deterritorialization of Finland-Swedish is put to use artistically. In relation to Swedish literature at large, this kind of Finland-Swedish literature, by being innovative, resists its minor status, or rather exploits it. It refuses to obey a standard put forth elsewhere, or rather turns the restraints of this standard into an artistic advantage. His "incorrect" language simultaneously enables him to write an avant-garde text, separate himself from the literary establishment *and* write a Finnish folklore text. At the same time as he digs his Swedish deep into Finnish soil, he somehow finds a way of exposing this Swedish as *manifold* and in close contact with other languages, refusing to let the reader fall comfortably into the arms of a seemingly whole, safe and stable language. With regionalisms,

⁶⁰ Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, 112f.

⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 101.

agrammaticalities, slang and language mixing, Diktonius displays the inherent variety of Finland-Swedish and, by extension, of all language. Nationalist assumptions of languages as whole entities, somehow naturally bound to a group of people, are deconstructed. By making his own language foreign, the foreignness of any language is evoked. “Here I am at home – here I am in a foreign land”.

Configurations « autographiques » dans *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* de Belen/Nelly Kaplan, ou comment déclencher le fou rire¹

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Avec *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*², publié sous le pseudonyme de Belen, déjà adopté auparavant pour la publication du recueil de nouvelles érotiques *Le Réservoir des sens*³, Nelly Kaplan donne à lire en 1974 un ouvrage hybride, aux frontières floues de l'écriture autobiographique et du *Bildungsroman*, deux genres que le spectaculaire récit d'une « liseuse de draps » subvertit constamment en jouant avec leurs paramètres narratifs. À la fois donc roman de formation, récit d'initiation sexuelle d'une jeune narratrice-protagoniste par un père-capitaine et roman d'aventures voire de piraterie, ces mémoires rassemblent et mêlent inextricablement, en un singulier récit de soi, réminiscences jouisseuses et fiction délirante, de même que des préoccupations révolutionnaires. L'initiation de l'héroïne à la vie – pratiques sexuelles et combats politiques confondus – se fait au rythme des luttes auxquelles elle participe accompagnée de son père, des cinq marins fidèles du *Sperma* et du lion Griffy manœuvrant le navire, contre vents et marées, vers des lointains exotiques. Les diverses étapes d'une vie hors du commun – allant de la petite enfance à l'âge adulte, dans

¹ Cet article s'inscrit dans une réflexion plus vaste menée dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche subventionné par le Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH) et intitulé « Pratiques autographiques chez les auteures-artistes surréalistes ». Je tiens à remercier de sa précieuse aide mon ancien assistant de recherche Pierre-David Gendron-Bouchard, de même que les étudiants ayant suivi à l'automne 2008 mon séminaire sur l'écriture auto(bio)graphique des auteures et artistes surréalistes, de leurs idées souvent fécondes en matière d'esthétique surréaliste et de récit de soi au féminin.

² Paris 1974. Désormais, les références à cette œuvre seront indiquées par le sigle M, suivi de la page, et placées entre parenthèses dans le corps du texte. Le texte a été réédité en 1998 par les Éditions de la Différence à Paris, réédition de nouveau épuisée.

³ Paris 1966 (illustré par André Masson). Le recueil a été réédité et augmenté d'une nouvelle en 1995 chez Le Castor astral.

un ordre chronologique parfois fautif⁴ – sont remémorées sur un ton désinvolte, dépourvu de pudeur. D'un apprentissage à l'autre, l'écriture de Belen/Nelly Kaplan est marquée d'un érotisme transgressif – il est question dans ce récit d'inceste, de viol, de zoophilie et de pornographie (mais toujours au second degré⁵) – et d'un jeu de références intertextuelles par lequel l'auteure revisite la culture canonique de l'Occident faisant preuve d'un sens érudit de la citation détournée ; cette écriture fait la part belle à des personnages féminins puissants, cruels à l'occasion. L'auteure recycle les mythes de la civilisation occidentale, dont ceux glorifiés par les surréalistes (la femme-enfant, la voyante, l'ensorceleuse et la meurtrière, entre autres), afin de mieux les renverser. Faut-il s'étonner que les *Mémoires* aient été interdits dès leur publication et qu'ils aient été réédités seulement un quart de siècle plus tard sous un autre titre, soit *Un manteau de fou rire* ? Que penser par ailleurs de ce changement de titre faisant glisser les *Mémoires* vers le roman autobiographique, voire l'« autofiction » avant la lettre ? Comment lire ce texte autrement que dans une double perspective qui tient compte à la fois des enjeux du surréalisme et de la pratique de réécriture de ses valeurs – éthiques et esthétiques – par bon nombre d'auteurs-artistes de la deuxième et de la troisième génération du mouvement surréaliste, parmi lesquelles figure Belen/Nelly Kaplan⁶ ?

Dans le cadre d'une réflexion sur l'avant-garde, le modernisme et l'Europe, notre analyse de l'œuvre littéraire examinera plus précisément deux aspects qui semblent témoigner de la longévité de l'avant-garde-surréaliste au-delà de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, notamment en ce qui concerne le principal projet esthétique du Surréalisme : effacer les

⁴ Comme la mémoire est reconstruite par le biais de l'écriture, la chronologie semble parfois poser problème à la narratrice : « Mais je m'égare toujours, intervient-elle de façon humoristique dans la trame narrative. Que le lecteur veuille bien me pardonner. Il sait, comme moi, que souvenirs et sensations se moquent souvent de la chronologie » (M, 144).

⁵ À propos de la manipulation des modèles et stéréotypes pornographiques que pratique Belen/Nelly Kaplan, voir l'excellente analyse de Gwendolyn Wells, « Deviant Games », *L'esprit créateur*, 4, 1991, 69-77. Ajoutons que sont exclus de toutes les expériences érotiques – allant de l'initiation sexuelle de la narratrice par le père aux amours libertines qui ponctuent le récit de formation – la perversité douloureuse, sadisme et masochisme y compris. Pour plus de détails, voir Stella Béhar, « Belen : gourme et gourmandises (*Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* ou le néo-surréalisme des années soixante-dix chez Nelly Kaplan), in : *Symposium : A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 1, 1996, 3-15, ici 11-14.

⁶ Martine Antle place dans le contexte de la réécriture et de l'identité féminine son analyse des œuvres d'Unica Zürn, de Leonora Carrington et de Nelly Kaplan : *Cultures du surréalisme : la représentation de l'Autre*, Paris 2001. Pour la partie concernant Kaplan, voir les pages 138-50. À consulter également à propos de la réécriture au féminin chez certaines auteures surréaliste, Katherine Conley, *Automatic Woman : the Representation of Women in Surrealism*, Lincoln-London 1996.

frontières entre l'art et la vie, entre l'expression artistique et la visée éthique. Ainsi, dans un premier temps, il s'agira de révéler, derrière le double je(u) auquel se livre la mémorialiste, la charge subversive d'une enquête sur soi⁷ qui passe nécessairement par autrui. Pour ce faire, on examinera de près ce récit de soi dont le pacte autobiographique demeure obscur, mais qui s'inscrit le plus souvent sur le mode de l'ironie dans la quête identitaire prônée par Breton dès les premières pages de *Nadja*. On verra que, bien qu'inspirée par des faits réels, la narratrice se plaît à s'inventer un passé tissé d'épisodes mi-fantastiques, mi-fantasmagoriques et qu'au fond, dans ces mémoires travestis, il s'agit de mettre en place une poétique du « fou rire » : l'humour n'épargne rien ni personne, encore moins le sujet de l'énonciation. Dans un second temps, il paraît important de se pencher sur le principe de « piraterie » à l'œuvre dans les *Mémoires* et permettant à Belen/Nelly Kaplan d'interroger certains textes et figures emblématiques de l'histoire culturelle ; la partie sur la réécriture ouvrira sur l'apport de toutes ces auteures et artistes venues à Paris non seulement des quatre coins de l'Europe mais du monde entier, ayant contribué au renouveau des valeurs avant-gardistes.

Mémoires et travestissement

Il est vrai que le récit « autographique » à l'étude – car il ne s'agit pas de relater sa vie mais de la réinventer par le biais d'un double « je(u) »⁸ – prône des pratiques sexuelles illicites et qu'Éros fait conjuguer, dans le contexte d'une quête identitaire néosurréaliste⁹, certains principes et idées chers aux avant-gardes dites historiques, *i.e.* la conscience politique et la révolution des mœurs sexuelles ; il est également vrai que l'obscène est systématiquement convoqué dans les événements remémorés par la cinéaste et auteure Nelly Kaplan, d'origine argentine-russe, installée à Paris en 1953 pour y travailler avec Abel Gance puis au sein du cercle

⁷ « Subversion » est ici à comprendre dans le sens du renversement d'institutions, de valeurs, de modèles et de mythes qui peut aller chez Belen/Kaplan jusqu'à la carnavalisation des sources d'inspiration.

⁸ À propos de ces récits autographiques surréalistes et leur implication scripturaire, voir Andrea Oberhuber, « S'écrire à la dérive : du plaisir, de la souffrance et de la complaisance chez Claude Cahun, Leonora Carrington et Unica Zürn », in : Jean-Michel Devésa (éd.), *Plaisir, souffrance et sublimation*, Bordeaux 2007, 133-48.

⁹ Voir à ce propos Stella Béhar (« Belen : gourme et gourmandises », 3) qui réunit sous le terme de « néosurréalisme » traversant les années 1970, à côté de Nelly Kaplan, des auteurs tels qu'André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Julien Gracq, Gérard Klein, Jacques Sternberg et Topor.

vieillissant des surréalistes autour de Breton et de Soupault¹⁰. Notons cependant que, tout au long de sa double carrière, Belen/Nelly Kaplan fait preuve d'une indépendance d'esprit, digne d'une véritable « flibustière », et que ses relations avec les surréalistes sont marquées, selon sa propre vision, par le principe d'égalité, loin des hiérarchies traditionnelles¹¹.

Mais que relate donc au juste ce texte immédiatement interdit au moment de sa publication ? Le texte littéraire de 1974, apparemment si choquant dans une Europe post-révolution-sexuelle, ne fut réédité qu'en 1998 et placé d'office sous le signe d'une double transformation : le nouveau titre – *Un manteau de fou rire* – efface les signes de son appartenance au genre autobiographique traditionnel des Mémoires, tout comme l'auteure semble avoir changé de nom puisque la réédition renvoie le lecteur à Nelly Kaplan. Le titre originaire évoque explicitement le souvenir, *la* mémoire. Il dialogue avec l'indication générique *roman* placée sur la première de couverture chez Pauvert. Alors que les Mémoires revendiquent la relation d'événements réels du passé de l'auteur, le roman est essentiellement fiction. Un double jeu est donc institué par cette mise en rapport du titre et de l'indication générique : les traditionnelles dichotomies réalité/fiction et temporalité/atemporalité sont suspendues. Le temps qui passe transforme le réel en fiction, agrandir l'écart entre le « je » narrant et le « je » narré. L'auteure semble adhérer à la conception d'une « durée automatique », comme le souligne Georges Sebbag¹². Et en effet, l'avant-propos des *Mémoires* s'ouvre sur une déclaration qui étend le temps : « J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans ... » (M, 9). En d'autres termes, à travers le récit « d'aventures passionnantes, passionnées » (M, 33-4) truffé d'« humour fou » et de considérations

¹⁰ Pour plus de détails sur la vie, la carrière et les pratiques artistiques de la cinéaste-auteure, je renvoie le lecteur à l'essai de Denys-Louis Colaux, *Nelly Kaplan : portrait d'une flibustière*, Paris 2002. À propos de la vision cinématographique de Kaplan et de ses liens avec Abel Gance, maître cinématographique avant-gardiste longtemps méconnu des surréalistes, voir Martine Antle, « Dedans et dehors : le cas de Nelly Kaplan et d'Abel Gance », in : *Mélusine*, 23, 2003, 87-95.

¹¹ Voir Denys-Louis Colaux, « Les forces libératrices de la subversion : Marie, Belen, Née », in : Mireille Calle-Gruber & Pascale Risterucci (éd.), *Nelly Kaplan : le Verbe et la Lumière*, Paris 2004, 37-56, ici 181-2. Colaux n'est pas le seul à insister systématiquement sur l'esprit libérateur de Kaplan. Vont dans le même sens les propos introductifs de Mireille Calle-Gruber (« Fiançailles des arts », in : Calle-Gruber & Risterucci (éd.), *Nelly Kaplan*, 7-13, ici 8) qui souligne le refus d'adhésion de l'artiste à « tout mouvement en "isme" » (surréalisme, féminisme, etc.). Sans oublier le parti pris de Nelly Kaplan se revendiquant d'une seule lutte, celle par « l'humour, la plus haute révolte de l'esprit » (« Nelly Kaplan dans tous ses états », in : Calle-Gruber & Risterucci (éd.), *Nelly Kaplan*, 15-28, ici 25).

¹² Georges Sebbag, « Nelly Kaplan, la page, le drap et l'écran », in : Calle-Gruber & Risterucci (éd.), *Nelly Kaplan*, 99-115, ici 99 et 104-5.

ironiques, ce temps de réminiscence suspendu au vol est propice à la fictionalisation de soi : le « je » narrant se met en scène dans divers décors, sous différents masques et travestissements, il se découvre autre (« *JE était une autre* », M, 41) et s'invente de nouvelles identités. Si le double jeu auquel se livre la mémorialiste en 1974 permet de révéler la charge subversive d'une enquête sur soi qui passe par autrui, par les grandes préoccupations sociopolitiques de l'époque et, surtout, par la métamorphose identitaire, le récit de soi ayant pris en 1998 la forme de mémoires travestis, valorise d'emblée par le titre le « fou rire ». Cette poétique du « fou rire », sous couvert d'un manteau, rend hommage à l'héritage paternel. C'est que, lors du baptême de la narratrice sur le *Sperma*, le père offre à sa fille « l'arme la plus fabuleuse qui puisse être offerte à un être humain : l'humour », en lui faisant cadeau symboliquement d'« un manteau de fou rire », « collé à [s]a peau » (M, 32) pour la vie entière. Le « fou rire », sceau d'une filiation masculine, est également à l'œuvre dans les nombreux emprunts de citations détournées dont sont truffés les *Mémoires* de Belen – nous y reviendrons dans le contexte de la réécriture et de la piraterie¹³.

Changement de titre et de nom mis à part, le récit des divers épisodes « invraisemblables » se nourrit de sensations et de souvenirs liés à certains combats révolutionnaires, situations éprouvantes ou personnes marquantes du passé. D'une édition à l'autre, la narration cède volontiers la place à des commentaires autoréférentiels¹⁴ ou à des réflexions métadiscursives quant à l'impact des aventures sur l'avenir de celle qui se révélera experte en lecture de draps. Cette remémoration d'un « je » héroïque, se construisant à la lisière du réel, du fantastique et de l'onirique sert le but principal, comme je viens de le postuler, d'une fictionalisation de soi qui fait exploser par le rire¹⁵ le cadre fixe des temporalités, des paramètres narratifs et de la conception de l'autographe. Le « je » narrant ou Belen-l'auteure s'inscrit à même la narration, s'accorde une place importante au sein même du récit de son héroïne de papier. Le récit est parsemé d'éclairs

¹³ Il y aurait beaucoup à dire sur les très nombreux intertextes et leur détournement le plus souvent ironique par l'auteure des *Mémoires*. Ce qui en ressort est une incontestable érudition en matière de références culturelles et littéraires occidentales. Mais ce savoir ne peut jamais être intégré tel quel, les idées véhiculées par les citations étant sujettes à un processus de renversement ou d'érotisation.

¹⁴ Sur les films d'art (rappelons que Kaplan a tourné des documentaires sur Gustave Moreau, Abel Gance et Picasso), voir M, 49, 142 et 143 ; sur l'amour pour le cinéma en général, M, 85 ; sur le recueil *Le Réservoir des sens*, M, 190-1.

¹⁵ Selon Stella Béhar, l'auteure des *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* emprunte d'ailleurs au surréalisme « ironie, humour noir, anticléricalisme et irrévérence » : « L'écriture surréaliste de Nelly Kaplan », in : Georgiana M. M. Colville & Katharine Conley (éd.), *La femme s'entête : la part du féminin dans le surréalisme*, Paris 1998, 275-89, ici 279.

de lucidité sur les ficelles de sa propre écriture, et ces ficelles sont sans cesse dévoilées. Par les multiples stratégies d'interventions, l'auteure démasque les mécanismes du jeu mémoriel auquel Belen-la narratrice se dit vouloir livrer dès le départ et dans lequel elle souhaite entraîner le lecteur grâce au pacte autobiographique s'avérant rapidement de nature autofictionnelle. Aussi la quête identitaire de Belen/Nelly Kaplan déjoue-t-elle les principes d'une profonde investigation sur soi – d'une possible rédaction de ses Mémoires –, dans la mesure où elle joue *candide*ment avec les concepts du genre littéraire et de l'identité du sujet qui se forme et se transforme grâce à une (r)évolution sexuelle individuelle. Le « je » narrateur se miroite dans un passé mirobolant, dans une myriade d'identités diverses en correspondance avec le combat à mener, toujours contre le Mal. En convoquant ces images mémorielles, construites pour la plupart de toutes pièces, la narratrice réfléchit sur le moment présent de l'écriture¹⁶, fait preuve d'ironie à l'égard de son projet scripturaire et se projette souvent dans un futur proche en voulant léguer à la postérité, aux jeunes filles et garçons, la mémoire de ses « joyeuses erreurs ». Dans l'avant-propos, l'auteure dote explicitement son projet d'écriture d'une visée pédagogique. Sur le ton ludique qui lui est propre, elle valorise son passé tout en s'inscrivant dans le futur : « Si le récit de mes avatars pouvait aider une seule jeune fille, un seul garçon à commettre les mêmes joyeuses erreurs qui ont enrichi mes 9 125 journées de vie, le texte qui va suivre trouverait amplement sa raison d'exister » (M, 9).

Concluons ces quelques considérations d'ordre générique, on constatant que, sur le *continuum* entre fiction et vérité, les *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* se situent davantage du côté de l'autofictionnel¹⁷ et que, par la création d'une réalité historique fictive¹⁸, la mémorialiste semble vouloir s'inscrire dans une histoire parallèle, subjective, qui coïncide toutefois avec

¹⁶ Citons à titre d'exemple le passage suivant : « Le soufflé fut dévoré en moins de temps que celui que je prends pour décrire la scène » (M, 30).

¹⁷ J'endosse la réflexion d'Yves Baudelle, excellente synopsis proposée dans le contexte de l'actuel débat sur les genres autobiographiques, pour qui la distinction entre roman autobiographique et autofiction relève de la frontière des genres et de leur poétique : « Autofiction et roman autobiographique : incidents de frontière », in : Robert Dion, Frances Fortier, Barbara Havercroft & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (éd.), *Vies en récit. Formes littéraires et médiatiques de la biographie et de l'autobiographie*, Québec 2007, 43-7, ici 43-4. Voir également Régine Robin, *Le Golem de l'écriture. De l'autofiction au cybersoi*, Montréal 1997.

¹⁸ Il convient d'insister sur l'importance des notes de bas de page dont est agrémentée la narration et qui renvoient à des soi-disant ouvrages savants témoignant des événements « historiques » évoqués dans le récit. Chaque fois, on rappelle la notoriété publique des exploits décrits. Voir par exemple les notes aux pages 79 ou 154. Ces notes infrapaginales, toujours « sans date d'impression » (M, 79) sont le meilleur signe de l'« atemporalité » qui règne dans le récit.

certains événements politiques (les luttes révolutionnaires) ou débats de société (la contraception). La mythologie personnelle créée à travers la mémoire individuelle sous la forme littéraire de *Mémoires* rencontre chez Belen/Nelly Kaplan la mémoire collective faisant apparaître celle-ci sous un autre masque, celui d'une auteure « à l'affirmation de soi mordante et extravagante » qui ne vise pas « l'accomplissement du vrai¹⁹ ». Le fictionnel semble littéralement avaler le réel biographique et historique.

Masques identitaires

Au premier abord, rétrospective de la vie d'une jeune fille orpheline de mère, devenue précocement révolutionnaire, le récit place les événements relatés dans une temporalité floue, dans un passé-présent imprécis, bref dans une temporalité autre, pour ainsi dire *parallèle*, qui associe l'Histoire humaine à l'histoire individuelle, autrement dit autobiographique. Cette contiguïté du réel et du fictionnel relève du fantasme, mais d'un fantasme qui prend résolument appui sur le vécu pour fonder le virtuel, le *vivable*. Il semble que ce soit pour pallier par la fiction à l'univocité ultime de l'existence que l'auteure a adopté, par le biais du pseudonyme *Belen*, l'identité de sa narratrice-protagoniste donnant ainsi à cette dernière toutes les allures d'un récit autofictionnel, l'identité onomastique²⁰ en moins (ce à quoi remédie la réédition !). Ce que l'on reconnaît souvent comme l'une des prérogatives de la lecture – la possibilité de vivre davantage que ce que nous pourrions expérimenter par nous-mêmes – est ici réquisitionné par l'écriture ; Belen/Nelly Kaplan s'écrit à travers une autre qui ne l'est pas tout à fait. Les diverses allusions au « JE est un autre » rimbaldien prennent à l'égard des *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* une dimension structurale, mais selon une compréhension particulière de la formule. Lorsque la narratrice dit dans une temporalité diachronique : « JE était une autre » (M, 41), c'est une métamorphose radicale, un processus de maturation accéléré qu'elle évoque, causé par la vue de l'horreur d'un massacre commis par le traître José Acero et ses sbires, et non par la « coexistence », au sein d'une même entité humaine, d'un moi dédoublé. Plus loin, le « je ne me reconnus pas, tant j'étais devenue une autre » (M,

¹⁹ Georges Sebbag, « Nelly Kaplan : la page, le drap et l'écran », 111. L'auteur place Kaplan dans la lignée des créateurs excentriques parmi lesquels il compte également Claude Cahun et Witold Gombrowicz (110-1).

²⁰ Depuis Philippe Lejeune (*Le pacte autobiographique*, Paris 1975), malgré certaines révisions définitoires, l'identité du nom de l'auteur, du narrateur et du personnage principal passe pour une caractéristique majeure de toute écriture autobiographique.

174) concerne l'aspect physique de la narratrice plutôt que sa subjectivité, qui n'est pas modifiée par son jeu de travestissement ; qu'elle soit Belen ou qu'elle adopte la fausse identité de Léonie Auboïs d'Ashby²¹ par exemple, elle n'aspire qu'à tuer José Acero, ennemi suprême depuis l'aventure galapagoise. Le seul *dédoublément* véritable du texte se produit lors de l'épisode où la narratrice séduit Van Ryn Susy, agent de la Compagnie des Indes Américaines (CIA) et inventeur des sucettes de lait condensé, avant de l'assassiner froidement lors de leurs ébats sexuels : « Et je dus enfin me rendre à l'évidence : malgré la haine que j'éprouvais à l'égard de Van Ryn Susy je me trouvais prise à mon propre jeu, prisonnière d'une sorte de dédoublément tel que, tandis qu'une partie de moi-même voyait le grotesque de la situation, une autre désirait pousser plus loin encore le jeu érotique » (M, 117). Ce dédoublément est cependant immédiatement suivi d'une sorte de prise de conscience, qui ironise la psychanalyse et indique que la narratrice est en processus d'individuation : « En supprimant le père des Sucettes Susy, ces sucettes qui avaient été mon lait nourricier, c'était un peu comme si j'avais tué ma mère. Cette fois je me devais d'assumer sans rémission un orphelinat total. C'est ainsi, par paliers, qu'on atteint l'âge adulte » (M, 120). Grâce au matricide commis par le truchement du parricide, le « je » narré est sur le chemin de la femme-à-venir, à mille lieues de la femme-enfant, de la femme-fleur ou de la muse, bref de la femme « automatique²² », toutes trois issues de l'imaginaire fantasmatique des poètes surréalistes. Par ailleurs, dès le baptême sur Sperma, cet avenir d'une « nouvelle femme » sacrilège est inscrit dans les lettres qui formeront le nom de la narratrice jeune, soit Belen : outre le fait que plusieurs villes et villages d'Amérique latine, dont en Argentine, pays de naissance de l'auteure, portent ce nom, « belèn » signifie en espagnol « crèche de Noël » ou désigne une *scène de nativité*, tout comme ce terme est le nom espagnol de Bethléem, haut-lieu de la chrétienté. Le nom propre, source première de l'identité de tout sujet, renvoie donc par la polysémie d'un calembour interlinguistique au récit fondateur de la civilisation

²¹ L'importance de cette figure féminine à laquelle Rimbaud, dans les *Illuminations*, déclare sa « Dévotion » (« À ma sœur Léonie Auboïs d'Ashby ») est primordiale. Pour l'Exposition internationale du surréalisme de 1947, Breton conçut par exemple un « Autel à Léonie Auboïs d'Ashby ». Dans *Le point sublime : André Breton, Arthur Rimbaud, Nelly Kaplan* (Paris 1997, 43-52), Georges Sebbag explore la trace d'Ashby reliant Rimbaud, Breton et Kaplan.

²² Dans *Automatic Woman*, Katherine Conley propose une étude fort éclairante de la représentation du féminin dans le surréalisme sur la base d'une relecture d'un des textes fondateurs de Breton et d'Éluard, *L'Immaculée Conception*, dans le but d'analyser non seulement l'impact de la « femme automatique », soit la muse et ses dérivés, sur l'imaginaire surréaliste, mais aussi son détournement par des auteures comme L. Carrington et U. Zürn.

occidentale²³, pour imposer au fil de la narration une nouvelle figure rédemptrice au féminin. Avec Belen comme pseudonymat d'écriture et à travers toutes les connotations (top)onomastiques, la visée iconoclaste des *Mémoires* à l'égard d'un monde révolu atteint son apogée.

Traitement mémoriel de l'histoire et (auto)référentialité

Si les aventures de la narratrice, bien qu'inspirées de faits réels, sont pour la plupart fictives et le revendiquent ouvertement – leur caractère tantôt féérique, tantôt fantastique en témoigne –, quelque chose de la « vraie vie » se retrouve tel quel, sans altération, dans les *Mémoires* : les convictions éthiques et les valeurs esthétiques de Belen/Nelly Kaplan, de même que ses souvenirs émotifs d'une tranche de vie constitutive dans la formation de la personnalité d'un individu par son milieu social et le contexte historique. Tout se passe dans ces réminiscences du passé par une liseuse de draps comme si la création artistique pouvait, en son sein, moduler la réalité matérielle, mais non le ressort humain des événements, qui se trouve parfaitement reproduit de l'autre côté du miroir. Ainsi en est-il de la révolte axiomatique de l'héroïne contre l'injustice, l'oppression et l'intolérance ; ainsi de sa revendication d'une liberté sexuelle sans compromis, de son amour, son admiration ou son aversion envers certaines figures marquantes du passé. À cet égard, l'évocation de la « race des VAMPIRES » (M, 195) parisiens dans le bref chapitre XI est particulièrement intéressante. Bien que la rencontre de la narratrice avec ces êtres ne soit pas directement abordée dans les *Mémoires*, devant faire, selon le « je » narrant, l'objet d'une éventuelle suite à ceux-ci, il en est question à quelques reprises, et ils sont même nommés : « Angec », « Norteb », « Ultapuso ». Le procédé anagrammatique laisse peu de doutes sur l'identité des personnes réelles dont il est question ici : Abel Gance, André Breton et Philippe Soupault. De son séjour à Paris, la narratrice dit :

Je ne savais pas encore que dans cette ville j'allais connaître un ennemi, me battre avec et succomber ; réagir, me révolter, me libérer enfin — après une lutte impitoyable — de la seule espèce qui me fût encore inconnue, la plus séduisante-

²³ Signalons en passant, comme le fait remarquer Doudouk, un des marins de Sperma, qu'il y a aussi paronomase entre le prénom de Belen et Belle Hélène (M, 154), ce qui, sur le plan mythologique, rappelle l'origine de la Guerre de Troie et, à l'intérieur du récit autographique, le « Nouveau Jugement de Paris » [Pâris] (M, 147), concours de beauté charnelle dont la narratrice en poste au Palais Obsexuel était sortie vainqueuse.

effrayante, redoutable-admirable, la *seule* contre laquelle toutes mes armes — et j'en avais ! — s'avérèrent au tout début d'une totale inefficacité. [...]

Ils arrivèrent vers moi un par un, de sectes diverses souvent hostiles. Charmée, je n'y pris pas garde. Jusqu'au beau matin où je repris connaissance empêtrée dans leurs griffes, clouée par leurs dents, victime plus ou moins consentante de leurs sortilèges.

Car elle est attirante, la race des vampires ... (M, 195-6)

Ces lignes font état du processus d'autonomisation d'une femme embrigadée par des êtres jouissant d'un grand prestige intellectuel et artistique au moment où elle fait leur connaissance, de sa graduelle conquête d'indépendance face à eux, qui l'avaient d'abord envoûtée, de son *décentrement* par rapport à la ligne que préconisaient ceux qui, tels les vampires, aspiraient à faire des autres leurs semblables. L'expression de ces « sentiments mêlés » concernant les vampires trouve sa source dans l'intériorité émotionnelle et mémorielle du « je » narrant. Ne sommes-nous pas alors en droit de supposer que la haine de Staline ou la « maternophobie » dont la narratrice fait mention, elle est allée les chercher chez Nelly Kaplan, surréaliste de la troisième génération, empreinte, malgré son esprit d'indépendance, non seulement des grands enjeux politiques surréalistes mais aussi de l'esprit de révolte permanente des années 1970 ? Tout concourt à nous faire croire que ces sentiments étaient si puissants qu'ils devaient forcément traverser le canal établi par l'écriture mémorielle entre la personne de chair Nelly Kaplan et son *alter ego* Belen.

Le transfert de considérations personnelles de la vie vers la création apparaît comme une lecture, consubstantielle à l'écriture, de soi, de sa personnalité, de son idiosyncrasie. Ce « bilan », dont le « je » narrant dit souvent qu'il sent le besoin de le faire, s'attache moins aux événements de la vie, aux tribulations qu'elle a comportées, qu'à la spectaculaire invention de soi, à cette autogenèse par les mots précisément moyennant une mémoire fictionnalisée. Nul doute cependant que l'invention d'un personnage aussi romanesque que cette *Belen* passe par la prémisse philosophique du « Connais-toi toi-même ». Cette devise ancienne, à l'origine de toute entreprise autobiographique, est revisitée par Belen et auscultée d'un regard oblique, afin que la narratrice-protagoniste puisse lire et comprendre son avenir grâce à une meilleure appréhension de son passé-présent spécifique. Voilà peut-être la raison la plus profonde de ce scrupule que ressent la narratrice, jusqu'à la toute fin du récit, quant à la lecture dans les draps de son propre avenir ; avant de savoir ce qu'elle fera, il lui faut savoir qui elle est (et qui elle a été), se connaître assez, faire preuve d'une grande lucidité afin de comprendre ce que la menée de son

existence aura de spécifique. Lorsque, finalement, elle est capable de *voir* son avenir, il ressemble étrangement à son passé :

Je distingue, loin encore, *Sperma II*, fidèlement reconstruit, qui navigue vers moi ... Plus loin, un peu partout de par le monde, les révoltes se remettent en marche ... Des années de lutte exaltante défilent devant moi ... Et des quintaux de sperme s'écoulent pour rendre encore plus tendre ma peau des hautes cuisses ...
[...] *Tout recommence* ... (M, 207-8, je souligne)

La *Belen-qui-était* et la *Belen-qui-sera* étant d'une même étoffe, formée et solidifiée seulement par la vie, les rencontres et les expériences, le futur partagera avec le passé l'essentiel, ne se fixant pourtant jamais, selon l'évocation qu'en fait la narratrice, en un seul amant, ou en la victoire définitive d'une éventuelle révolution mondiale. Ce qui continuera de caractériser la vie *extérieure* de Belen, c'est le mouvement turbulent du monde ; tandis qu'en elle, les événements antérieurs ont forgé une personnalité lucide. La *picara* s'est formée, la flibustière est arrivée à bon port, le monde l'effraie encore moins qu'au départ, elle le désire pour y frotter son moi assagi.

Révolte, révolution, piraterie

À l'instar du langage, ce catalyseur de souvenirs et d'images mémorielles, la *révolution* permanente sert de révélateur de soi. Les *Mémoires* s'inspirent en vérité d'une conception de la révolte politique et de l'utopie d'une sexualité libérée de toutes les contraintes qui, lorsque revendiquées en théorie puis pleinement vécues, peuvent permettre au « je » de passer du statut de voyeuse (et d'actrice) à celui de voyante, de celle qui sait, comprend et assume son destin. Dans cette optique, la capacité de lecture de l'avenir que se découvre la narratrice à partir des « cartes spermographiques gravées par l'érosion des héros d'Eros » (M, 149) dans les draps du Palais Obsexuel de Shanghai prend toute son ampleur : savoir lire dans les draps fait passer le sexuel dans le poétique. De la même manière s'entremêlent enjeux éthiques et réflexions esthétiques dans les luttes révolutionnaires et les conquêtes érotiques de la narratrice.

Ainsi, sur fond de combats menés par une révolutionnaire, qui « rappelle[nt] les positions prises par certains surréalistes dans le conflit [...] entre Trotsky et Staline²⁴ », la jeune narratrice-protagoniste exploite le

²⁴ Stella Béhar, « L'écriture surréaliste de Nelly Kaplan », 282.

pouvoir de la sexualité féminine. C'est ce pouvoir de séduction qui lui permet de mettre à mort cruellement, dans le travestissement de l'aventurière mystérieuse Léonie Auboïs d'Ashby, son adversaire principal : « José Acero alias Joe Steel, Joseph Acier, Giuseppe Aciaio, Joseph Stahal, Staline ... Autant de pseudonymes d'un masque identique, celui de l'assassin de Jaguar, de Marina et de tant d'autres, le grand organisateur de trahisons, mon ennemi mortel » (M, 106-7). Comme auparavant dans le combat contre Van Ryn Susy, la sexualité est utilisée comme une arme afin que le « je » narré puisse triompher de son ennemi juré. Dans cet univers de Bons et de Méchants, les hommes affaiblis et dominés par leur désir sexuel périssent, la ruse féminine menant à la victoire dans les deux cas.

Puisqu'un militantisme peut en cacher un autre, la narratrice réfugiée sur la petite île de Flores avoue, face à une grossesse involontaire, être une « [m]aternophobe militante » (M, 198). La cruauté s'avère à nouveau une arme qui remédie une fois de plus aux effets néfastes du désir sexuel. Grâce aux vertus abortives de la plante « *drosera rotundifolia*, variété *belenus* » (M, 201), le « je » narré réussit dans « le domaine des luttes libératrices féminines » (M, 201) à faire disparaître l'intrus. Fidèle à son esprit de libération, Belen décide d'envoyer des graines de sa plante miraculeuse à tous les mouvements libérateurs féminins de la planète. On l'aura compris, la cruauté sexuelle et l'ironie subversive touchent à part égale non seulement le projet surréaliste dans sa visée politique et esthétique mais également les revendications du mouvement féministe de l'après-Mai 68²⁵ : Éros est placé au centre des pratiques illicites de la narratrice comme étant le principal « principe de création, de subversion et de libération²⁶ ».

Dans les *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, la création emprunte la voie de la relecture effectuée par une voix féminine. Suivant l'exemple de son héroïne, Belen-l'auteure se fait pirate à son tour. Au fil du récit, le lecteur reconnaît une série de phrases et de vers extraits du canon littéraire pour se rendre compte que, très souvent, les citations ont été travesties et chargées d'un nouveau sens érotique. Citons quelques exemples : « le temps semblait avoir suspendu son viol » (Lamartine, « Le lac ») ; « Tout n'était que calme, luxure et velouté » (Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*) ; « pour la première fois l'étoile venait de pleurer rose au cœur de mes orteils »

²⁵ Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron identifie, à propos de l'écriture des femmes dans le mouvement surréaliste, « deux sites majeurs de la créativité féminine », soit la violence et l'ironie, qui paraissent tous deux parfaitement illustrés dans l'œuvre à l'étude : « De l'écriture au féminin dans le surréalisme », in : Colville & Conley (éd.), *La femme s'entête*, 54-69, ici 68.

²⁶ Stella Béhar, « L'écriture surréaliste de Nelly Kaplan », 277.

(Rimbaud, *Poésies*)²⁷. D'autres phrases sont empruntées à des penseurs importants du XIX^e siècle et semblent endossées telles quelles par Belen/Nelly Kaplan. Ainsi en est-il de la formule maîtresse de Charles Fourier – « *Les attractions sont proportionnelles aux destinées*²⁸ » servant d'épigraphe aux *Mémoires*, ou d'une phrase-clé de Marx citant Hegel : « Car "l'Histoire se répète pour ainsi dire deux fois : la première fois comme tragédie, la seconde fois comme farce ... !" » Le savoir d'une culture, d'œuvres canoniques est transposé dans un nouveau contexte et contribue à ce que Mireille Calle-Gruber appelle une « lucide recreation et recreation du monde par la réécriture, le pastiche, les contre-façons en tout genre²⁹ ». Belen/Nelly Kaplan, par le truchement de son héroïne, entre en dialogue avec l'histoire culturelle, d'une part, et la pensée historique, d'autre part. Loin d'être un simple thème du récit, la piraterie « prend ici valeur de modèle politique et esthétique³⁰ ». Si l'aspect politique du récit sert le but de mettre en valeur la quête d'une société idéale, basée sur des rapports d'égalité, la charge esthétique vise essentiellement l'exploitation d'une culture canonique. En effet, le second degré est une (contre-)façon de s'approprier un héritage, de piller la littérature tout en s'inscrivant dans une lignée de créateurs et de penseurs. L'auteure ne cache pas son admiration pour ceux dont elle pirate les idées. En même temps, cette inscription dans une tradition – par ailleurs exclusivement masculine –

²⁷ Dans son portrait de Belen/Nelly Kaplan, Stella Béhar (« L'écriture surréaliste de Nelly Kaplan ») note à propos des *Mémoires* que l'auteure puise allégrement dans « toutes les références culturelles et littéraires glorifiées par les avant-gardes » (284) – Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Proust, Moreau –, rappelant un peu plus loin que cet hommage aux poètes, à la doxologie des poètes, a parfois été taxé par la critique féministe d'« exaltation phallocratique » (288).

²⁸ André Breton a composé une « Ode à Charles Fourier » (*Fata Morgana*, 1947) dont l'avant-dernier vers reprend également la formule fouriériste : « *Les attractions sont proportionnelles aux destinées* / En foi de quoi je viens aujourd'hui vers toi ».

²⁹ Mireille Calle-Gruber, « Fiançailles des arts », 10. Voir également Stella Béhar (« L'écriture surréaliste de Nelly Kaplan ») qui considère cette pratique comme « une réponse, un commentaire de femme sur l'océan des grandes pensées » (287-8), et Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron (« De l'écriture au féminin dans le surréalisme ») qui voit dans la relecture-réécriture effectuée par des femmes auteurs un « exercice d'imitation de l'homme par la femme [...] citationnel et parodique » (65).

³⁰ Pascale Risterucci, « À l'abordage. À propos de *La Fiancée du pirate* », in : Calle-Gruber & Risterucci (éd.), *Nelly Kaplan*, 55. L'auteure a raison d'insister sur la piraterie comme principe de création que l'on retrouve appliqué tant dans les textes littéraires que dans la production cinématographique de Belen/Nelly Kaplan. Il s'agit d'aborder les œuvres d'autrui, de les piller et de transposer ailleurs, dans un nouveau texte, une nouvelle œuvre artistique les trésors trouvés. La piraterie de Belen/Nelly Kaplan fait penser à la démarche de Katy Acker, poète, romancière et essayiste américaine, qui recourut volontiers au plagiat et aux techniques du *cut-up*.

semble impliquer chez la flibustière la remise en cause d'une vision hégémonique³¹, basée sur les grandes autorités de la culture européenne. Le fait de désacraliser, voire de *libidiniser* des vers ou adages ouvre l'espace à une nouvelle compréhension de certains lieux communs de l'histoire culturelle et littéraire. Finalement, ce procédé ironique est propice à la transgression des barrières du spirituel et du matériel, du sacré et du profane.

Conclusion

Nous avons vu que, à l'image de son père capitaine et des cinq marins du *Sperma*, tous voyageurs sans frontières, la narratrice-protagoniste navigue d'un pays à l'autre, part combattre les ennemis aux quatre coins du monde, fait l'apprentissage de la vie, de l'amour et de la mort ; nous avons pu constater que le texte lui-même se refuse à trouver un ancrage fixe en matière d'appartenance générique. Les frontières sont constamment élargies dans les *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps*, elles ne servent qu'à indiquer l'ouverture par laquelle le passage est possible.

Chez Belen/Nelly Kaplan, comme chez bien d'autres auteures-artistes surréalistes – pensons à Claude Cahun, Leonora Carrington, Leonor Fini, Frida Kahlo, Bona de Mandiargues ou Unica Zürn –, l'expérience de la frontière est presque systématiquement thématisée, dans les textes littéraires, les photographies, les tableaux, les dessins. L'expérience de la frontière, souvent reliée à une culture ou à une langue étrangères, parfois au simple statut d'altérité, est multiple chez ces créatrices. Les avant-gardes européennes, vu leurs prémisses d'internationalisation et d'abolition des frontières disciplinaires, accueillent des artistes venus d'ailleurs. Elles sont, pendant quelque temps, des laboratoires de tous les possibles. Espace souvent indéfinissable, difficilement circonscrit, espace de l'entre-deux, la frontière et, surtout, son dépassement se manifestent dans les œuvres de création des auteures-artistes surréalistes par une nomadité identitaire et une praxis intermédiaire³². La cinéaste-auteure Belen/Nelly Kaplan est pour ainsi dire une « passeuse de frontières » parmi d'autres, mais elle est également une « transgressive » par excellence. À travers l'humour fou et l'ironie, l'artiste rend perméables les frontières entre réalité et fiction, l'un et l'Autre, le modèle et la copie non conforme. Son œuvre cinémato-

³¹ Voir Martine Antle, *Cultures du surréalisme*, 150.

³² Voir à propos de cette problématique plusieurs études sur des auteures-artistes avant-gardistes rassemblées dans Andrea Oberhuber (éd.), *Claude Cahun : contexte, posture, filiation. Pour une esthétique de l'entre-deux*, Montréal 2007.

graphique et littéraire n'est concevable que sous les signes d'une *trans-frontalité* enrichissante bien que déstabilisante à plus d'un égard, tant pour l'auteure même que pour le lecteur-spectateur. Cette œuvre se situe au croisement de deux cultures, entre deux arts et leur médium respectif, entre divers genres littéraires et états d'être-au-monde mais se revendiquant toujours, dans l'acte de création, du postulat d'androgynie.

Philippe Soupault, dans l'introduction au *Manifeste d'un art nouveau : la Polyvision*³³, avait bien saisi en 1955 les principes fondamentaux de l'esthétique kaplanienne, lorsqu'il notait :

Comme Rimbaud, comme Lautréamont (qui, comme elle, est né « sur les rives du Rio de la Plata »), Nelly Kaplan démolit avec une joie non dissimulée toutes les barrières, tous les privilèges et renverse, en souriant, avec humour les partis pris et nous oblige à voir clair. Sans doute, cette violence admirable, inimitable parce qu'elle est celle de la conviction, ne manquera pas de heurter et même de scandaliser [...] parce que tout ce qui est vrai et neuf heurte et scandalise.

Les scandaleux *Mémoires d'une liseuse de draps* de 1974 ne nous heurtent plus lors de leur réédition en 1998 parce que les souvenirs sont couverts d'*Un manteau de fou rire*. Au contraire, la lecture de tous ces souvenirs d'épisodes déjantés, grâce à la charge érotico-révolutionnaire et aux nombreuses citations irrévérencieusement détournées, nous enchante, nous invite à l'abordage temporaire, pour mieux emporter le lecteur, sur une vague de fou rire, vers d'autres rivages.

³³ Paris 1955, 10.

Europe and Its Others

Artificial Africa in the European Avant-Garde: Marinetti and Tzara

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The early 20th-century modernist interest in non-European art has often been criticised for its notions of primitivism and “primitive art”, which appropriated distant cultures for aesthetic purposes. Here, likewise, I am interested in examining the diverse representations of the African exotic “primitive” within the European avant-gardes. My ultimate objective in looking at some key texts of dadaism and futurism, however, is not to trace a typology of their “Africanist” stereotypes, but to seek to locate the African factor within the creative vision and the ideologically diverse representations of European avant-gardes. In these representations, the revision of the meaning of “Europe” or Western culture is an inseparable element of the constructions of Africa. As has been previously argued, the primitivism of the historical avant-garde and modernism did not dismantle the traditional opposition between the civilized and the primitive – based on late 19th-century evolutionist ideas of the progress of human societies from the primitive to the modern – although it aimed to disempower and redesign these categories.¹ In this re-evaluation, both the primitive and Europe (or the “West”) were subjected to sweeping generalizations. European society, thus, emerged as a kind of false stereotype of the primitive. I believe, therefore, that by taking into consideration the occidentalism of the avant-garde – the way Europe (or the West) was perceived against the African exotic primitive – as a necessary counterpart of its many primitivisms, we may better shed light on the complex dialectic

¹ One important critical turning point in this respect was the debate over MOMA’s 1984 exhibition “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern” and the idea of “primitivism” employed at that exhibition, as documented in: Jack Flam & Miriam Deutch (eds.), *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, Berkeley 2003, 315-413.

through which European modern art continuously constituted itself in opposition to the outside world.²

This essay will investigate the interdependence between the projections of Africa and Europe in a few central texts by two main players in the early 20th-century European avant-garde, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Tristan Tzara. Starting with the founder of Italian futurism, F.T. Marinetti, and the scenes of rebirth in his first futurist manifesto and his “African” fiction, I will move on to discuss the meaning of the African elements in Tristan Tzara’s manifesto-like play, “La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine” (1916). By thus juxtaposing and comparing Marinetti and Tzara, I will seek to clarify their points of contact but also contrast their projections of Africa and Europe. By the reference to “artificial” in the title of my article, I do not mean to imply that Marinetti or Tzara were pretending that their projections of the African primitive were altogether imaginary. Neither do I want to claim that my essay discloses the artificial nature of their constructions of a supposedly real Africa. By stressing the artificial I want to draw attention to the way these artists and thinkers fully embraced, in their different ways, Africa and Europe as man-made entities, as ideas or concepts that could be freely reinvented, even though they referred to existing realities as well. This revision, equally, entailed a critical awareness of the artificiality of contemporary representations of Africa, including popular forms of *l’art nègre*, ethnological concepts of primitive mentality or colonialist rhetoric, although they also remained deeply indebted to such concepts and ideologies and, in the case of Marinetti, explicitly promoted their own avant-garde vision of colonialism.

² For a similar emphasis, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge 1988, 259, 272. Perloff, too, tackles the problem of occidentalism in certain “postmodernist” critiques of orientalism and primitivism. (Cf. Marjorie Perloff, “Tolerance and Taboo: Modernist Primitivisms and Postmodernist Pieties”, in: Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (eds.), *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, Stanford 1995, 339–54.) The specifically futurist forms of primitivism are treated expertly in: John J. White, *Literary Futurism: Aspects of the First Avant Garde*, Oxford 1990, 288–358. Several recent studies on the complex status of “the primitive” within surrealism, finally, are also insightful and helpful in this regard. See especially: Jean-Claude Blachère, *Les totems d’André Breton. Surréalisme et primitivisme littéraire*, Paris 1996; Philippe Sabot, “Primitivisme et surréalisme: une ‘synthèse’ impossible?”, in: *Methodos*, 3, 2003, 113–36; and Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, London 2003.

Marinetti's African Zone of Rebirth

It is noteworthy that there are many competing and not always converging stories about the modernist "discovery" of so-called primitive art. In particular, the Parisian circle of emerging painters who enthused about non-European art in the years 1905 and 1906, with the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, the Kahnweiler gallery and ethnographic exhibitions as their catalysts, has inspired several anecdotes about this discovery. These stories include the tale of the painter Maurice de Vlaminck being inspired by a statuette bought by his colleague Derain, Matisse showing Picasso and Gertrude Stein an African figurine he had found in a second-hand shop, and Picasso's encounter with African sculpture at the Trocadéro museum.³

The artists' self-proclaimed identification with the primitive, including myths about the artist's own primitive background, was also frequent at this time. In the early days of *l'art nègre* Pablo Picasso, for instance, found it fashionable to pretend to be of African descent. Later Max Ernst created a personal shamanistic myth of his having hatched from an egg. In contrast to such fictions, F.T. Marinetti could base his personal myth on fact, since he was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1876. His North African background, before he was sent to Paris to get his baccalaureate at the age of seventeen, also remained a long-lasting inspiration, which he developed throughout his career both in fiction and self-portraiture. As we know from his first futurist manifesto (1909), in the famous allegorical narrative in which an automobile accident is represented as a second birth, Marinetti placed the birth of futurism not only in a muddy ditch but also at his Sudanese nurse's black breast:

Oh, mother of a ditch, brimful with muddy water! Fine repair shop of a ditch! How I relished your strength-giving sludge that reminded me so much of the saintly black breast of my Sudanese nurse!⁴

This reference to a black African body (and Sudan) at the heart of the first manifesto offers us a privileged autobiographical perspective on a frequent motif in Marinetti's vision, which fuses African childhood and motherhood with glorious new technology. The image combines the technological with the natural, pitting the factory and the dirty soil of the ditch against the body of an African woman. All of these elements – the car ride

³ On the discovery of *l'art nègre* see for instance Jean Laude, *La Peinture française (1905-1914) et l'Art nègre*, Paris 1968 ; Flam & Deutch (eds.), *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, 27-116.

⁴ F.T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, tr. Doug Thompson, New York 2006, 13. I hereafter refer to this volume parenthetically as CW.

that ends in a ditch after Marinetti has dodged some cyclists, the taste of the soil, the memory of the nurse's black breast – are part of the same exalting experience of danger, or “the habit of energy and rashness” that is the first item on Marinetti's list of the qualities characterizing futurism.

Twenty years later, at the beginning of a short self-portrait in *Marinetti e il futurismo* (1929), Marinetti returns to the same memory of the Sudanese nurse, explaining now that

I started off with rose and black, a blossoming, healthy little tot in the arms and between the carbon-coke breasts, of my Sudanese nurse. Which maybe explains my somewhat *blackish* concept of love and my open antipathy toward milk-and-honey politics and diplomacy. (CW, 5)

Marinetti projects here the blackness of the Sudanese wet-nurse's breast, which is associated with a life-affirming instinctual force, a healthy appetite and a sense of freedom, onto his own psyche as an identity-endowing element. In the short lyrical segment about Africa that follows these reminiscences, Marinetti further describes the “witchery” of African evenings, the dark deserted beaches and landscape where people seem but “little blots of ink” against “the immaterial silks of a divine, oriental sky”. The Africa of Marinetti's childhood memories, therefore, stands for the unspoiled and untamed self, the “strange, colorful, uproarious sort of life” (CW, 5), a mixture of the Orient and the African, that the author does not want to lose sight of and that continues to inform his own identity.

The same image of instinctual freedom and emotional fullness in Africa, free from European constraints, is often accompanied in Marinetti's work not only by a preference for tough politics, as in the example above, but also by the reinvigorating effects of violence and war. We can find this principle, for instance, in the introduction to his novel, *Gli Indomabili* (The Untameables, 1922), where the author explains his interest in “nude raw” synthesis, simultaneity, and the “violent dynamic”, as stemming from his Egyptian childhood: “I had it in my free veins and my free muscles when as a naked baby I would play with the naked Negro urchins on the burning dunes of Ramleh” (CW, 63). How much of this street-wise toughness and supposed inner “blackness” was the product of the writer's later imagination is difficult to judge. On balance, perhaps the greater part. It is useful to bear in mind that Marinetti's family was part of Alexandria's cosmopolitan, well-to-do middle class, who sent their children to distinguished elite schools, such as the French Jesuits' school that Marinetti attended.

The setting of Africa as a place of rebirth and a symbol of inner blackness, receives perhaps its fullest and richest, but also most contradictory treatment in Marinetti's two “African” quasi-novels, *Mafarka le futuriste*:

Roman africain (Mafarka the Futurist. An African Novel, 1909) and *The Untameables*. Both novels describe miraculous scenes of birth in an imaginary African landscape. *Mafarka*, which Marinetti was writing simultaneously with his first futurist manifesto, begins with the infamous passage of the rape of the captured Negresses – perhaps the principal “erotic scene” in the text, and one which brought charges of obscenity against the novel’s Italian translation in Milan in October 1910 (Marinetti was acquitted). The despotic Arab King Mafarka-el-Bar’s men assault the women, as we are told, in one drunken, relentless mass of bodies while the women, beaten to the ground, seem to merge with the soil:

It was a fantastic pressing machine of yellowish bodies heaped up in pyramids and collapsing as they exuded their juices like monstrous olives under the burning cogs of the heavy solar wheel.⁵

It is as if the bodies of the Negresses become part of the fertile ground:

You saw the lithe glistening bellies of the young women, and their little breasts the colour of burnt coffee, writhing with pain under the heavy fists of the males, whose loins of bronze threshed tirelessly up and down amid the churning dance of green putrefication.⁶

Just as in the birth image of futurism in the muddy maternal ditch, here a violent penetration into the feminine soil creates new life. The African ditch of this scene is a space of destructive instincts, accompanied by the burning sun, but it is also a zone of violent regeneration.

In Marinetti’s African imagination, death and danger are always positive forces, which necessarily accompany the scene of rebirth. The spectacular birth of king Mafarka’s manufactured ‘son’, Gazourmah, an animated airplane woven from indestructible palm fiber, suggests a sort of counter-primitivism of the machine, an anti-modern modernism. The perfect malleability of the African landscape is revealed in Mafarka’s explanation, on the eve of his son’s coming alive:

our will must come out of us so as to take hold of matter and change it to our fancy. So we can shape everything around us and endlessly renew the face of the earth. Soon, if you appeal to your will, you will give birth without resorting to the woman’s vulva.⁷

⁵ F.T. Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist. An African Novel*, tr. Carol Diethe & Steve Cox, London 1998, 23.

⁶ Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 25.

⁷ Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist*, 146.

As Barbara Spackman has noted, the destruction of the earth in this scene is again a scene depicting the reduction of the female body to paste, which allows the male heroes to differentiate their own bodies and psyches from those of others.⁸ King Mafarka pursues perfect self-sufficiency in giving birth to his son out of pure will, recreating himself in his son. Upon his birth the machine-man thanks his father by killing him.

At the end of *The Untameables*, in contrast, we have a description of the birth of Paper People, allegorical figures representing European civilization and bookish knowledge. Here a monumental book bursts open with

a jerky flourish of colored pages. The liveliest of the pages tears itself from the book with a rapid whirl, forms a cone, pastes itself shut, stands up with its point on top. Just then, a light buds inside and as it grows it becomes redder and more fiery. Thus was born a Paper person. A written thought magically transformed into action-life.⁹

The Paper People are opposed in this allegory by a group called the Untameables, who are imprisoned during the day in a pit in the ground on an imaginary island perhaps located, as the narrator suggests, somewhere in the “African seas”. The two “African” groups: the Untameables, and the herculean Negroes who are the guardians of the former, are envisioned in Marinetti’s imagination as metaphors for uncontrollable human ferocity, a stark contrast to the “European” Paper People.

The opposition between vigorous Africa and decadent, feeble Europe is an essential component of Marinetti’s imagination, in which a “super man” is developed to replace the figure of the traditional Romantic hero. His play *Il tamburo di fuoco. Dramma africano di calore, colore, rumori, odori* (*Fire-Drum*, 1922) similarly brings into focus the dangerous aspects of Africa, its nature and magical practices, and the prospect of combining “African” raw instinct, exemplified in the play’s subtitle by warmth, colors, sounds, and smells, with futurist sensibility. Despite its sometimes painful heat, the ferocious African sun is for instance the greatest source of inspiration for the main character, legislator and chief Kabango. The sun and the immense forest with its elephants and snakes function in this play as a personified principle of a raw, antisentimental force, set up in contrast to what Kabango sees as rival poet Lanzirica’s sentimental effeminacy and

⁸ Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*, Minneapolis 1996, 70

⁹ F.T. Marinetti, *The Untameables*, tr. Jeremy Parzen, Los Angeles 1994, 187.

his European art of lying.¹⁰ The magical formula inscribed in the sacred hides and fetish of “Sinrun”, further, represents for Kabango the healing power and joy that is specific to Africa, “la felicità dell’Africa”, again in opposition to the European culture that he abhors: “Né odio, né amore per l’Europa!”.¹¹ The chief’s tragic end, betrayed and killed by his own people, dramatizes the paradoxical attempt to introduce the benefits of modern science and technology, while adhering to a kind of primordial notion of dark, wild Africa. This notion of Africa’s primordial and subversive qualities Marinetti also associated with dance. He wrote in his “Futurist Manifesto of Dance” (1917) that, in contrast to other contemporary experiments with rhythmic gymnastics, or impressionist and symbolist schools of dance, “We Futurists prefer Loïe Fuller and the Negroes’ *cakewalk* (making use of electric light and mechanical devices)” (CW, 210). What is again characteristic of Marinetti’s reference to the black body is not only that he associates it with the movement of the machine, but also that he amplifies the African body’s natural energies with mechanical devices.¹² What the electric machine and the Negro *cakewalk*, therefore, inspire in the futurist dancer is the “ideal of the body extended into machine” (CW, 210). The futurist dancer imitates the movements of the machine, which in turn makes palpable for us the lost primitive forces of life.

Marinetti’s futurist “African”, be it the self-destructive King Mafarka or the more enlightened and tragic Kabango, is in touch with his inner creative forces, excited by the prospect of danger, in harmony or in competition with raw natural forces. The imaginary African setting of

¹⁰ The sun is for Kabango an object of adoration, for instance, when he asks for mercy for his lover Mabima: “Sole! Sole feroce! Ti ho sempre amato e venerato! Ho sempre glorificato le tue sovrane leggi di calore e di luce. Perché dunque hai schierato in cielo contro de me tante baionette spietate?”. Kabango’s tragic end is usually seen to reflect Marinetti’s disappointment with politics of the day, in particular concerning the futurists’ alliance with Mussolini’s *Fasci*. Quote from: F.T. Marinetti, *Il tamburo di fuoco. Dramma africano*, in: *Teatro F.T. Marinetti*, Vol. III, ed. Giovanni Calendoli, Roma 1960, 1-82, here 12.

¹¹ Marinetti, *Il tamburo di fuoco*, 20.

¹² “Noi futuristi preferiamo Loie-Füller e il *cake-walk* dei negri (utilizzo della luce elettrica e meccanicità)”, in: Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, Milan 1968, 126. I would like to thank Przemyslaw Strozek for reminding me of this passage. The “mechanical” elements in the cakewalk are likely to be yet another example of Marinetti’s wish to fuse the mechanical and the technological with the primitive, thus celebrating the machine in the primitive. Another important aspect in cake-walk may also be that Marinetti thus expands Umberto Boccioni’s idea from *Pittura Scultura Futurista. Dinamismo Plastico* (1914) that the futurist passionate love of reality makes them prefer the American *cakewalk* to hearing the *Valkyrie*. (See: Umberto Boccioni, *Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Zeno Birolli, Milano 1971, 87). See also “Loie Fuller’s Influence on F. T. Marinetti’s Futurist Dance” by Ted Merwin, in: *Dance Chronicle*, 1, 1998, 73-92.

these texts dramatizes a crude distinction between primal (or instinctual) will and intellectual will, against which different varieties of the futurist rebel, emerge as a new solution. The machine-man or the Untameables are not bound by European ideas and civilization, except in the sense that they remind one of the latest European technologies. Some of the Paper People are in fact transformed into projectors, printing Marinetti's futurist manifestos on the sky in radiant writing. Thus again, futurism springs from the imaginary African zone, fusing writing with action, and technology with supposedly raw natural forces.

As a geographic location, Marinetti's Africa is a combination of different kinds of non-European spaces set in a timeless present, in which fantastic Islamic North Africa, the Sahara, and also central Africa, the safari and the jungle seem to coexist.¹³ Many of the central personalities, like chief Kabango, are, likewise, a mixture of different races: Arab, Berber, and black. Yet another crucial dimension of this pseudo-African zone is the capacity to welcome any transfer of properties between human qualities, natural forces and technology. Technological qualities are constantly attributed to humans (largely males) while human qualities (mainly female) are attributed to the landscape and to technology.¹⁴

The fluidity of identity in the African zone is contrasted with the space of Europe, which forms a distant backdrop to these imaginings. Africa thus dramatizes a fundamental tension prevalent in Marinetti's work: between the glorification of modern technology and the projection of an anti-European, more "honest" and primitive, perhaps Nietzschean society, not ashamed of the manly qualities of war, violence and pure lust. The exotic African primitive is an allegory of primal force. African space, in contrast, is fantastically malleable, and thoroughly but ambivalently gendered: it is a woman to be conquered and exploited, but at times "Africa" is also dangerously feminized in the shape of a devouring body. As a zone of constant renewal, "African" childhood and motherhood is positively allegorized by the black breast or the quality of toughness, while "Africa as a woman" is also negatively portrayed in the dirty maternal ditch, a filthy ravine, or, in *The Untameables*, and a prison pit that must be destroyed. These female aspects of the overdetermined African space (to be violated and reshaped) reveal the threat of proximity between the African and the European, or Europe and its colonies. "Africa" as a father

¹³ Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life*, Minneapolis 1986, 77-8.

¹⁴ Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 67; Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, 78-9, 86.

(Mafarka, Kabango) is a model for the futurist creation of a new Europe through the reshaping of the largely imaginary spaces of Africa.

Tzara's Primitive Sounds and the Spontaneous, Headless *Nègre*

When Tristan Tzara republished his First dada manifesto as "Manifeste de Monsieur Antipyrine" in the *Sept Manifestes Dada* (Seven Dada Manifestos, 1924), he had removed the reference, at the end of the manifesto, to so-called "negro art". The expression "Negro art without humanity" from the original 1916 version of the manifesto is replaced, curiously enough, by the word "ventilator", and in the same sentence the mention of "the South" is changed to "crime". So in the first version we read that dada does not believe art to be serious and that "si nous montrons le Sud pour dire doctement: l'art nègre sans humanité c'est pour vous faire du plaisir",¹⁵ we read in the second version, instead, "si nous montrons le crime pour dire doctement ventilateur c'est pour vous faire du plaisir" ("if in exhibiting crime we learnedly say ventilator, it is to give you pleasure").¹⁶ Like a typical futurist metaphor that fuses man with the machine, Tzara's curious alteration thus lets the ventilator take the place of man.¹⁷

Whatever the author's subjective reasons may have been for this change, the transformation of the sentence is indicative of a general shift within the avant-garde movements of the time. By 1924, and perhaps already by 1920 when Tzara had finished the last of his seven manifestos, *l'art nègre* had changed from being an esoteric symbol of revolt to being the subject of popular interest.¹⁸ The idea of Negro art, inspired by African music and ritual masks, had been central to Tzara's involvement in early dadaist activities in Zürich. The *Negerrhythmus*, Negro dances and the sounds of "African" names and languages and interspersed pseudo-African words, feature in many of the first dada *soirées*, accompanied sometimes by "poèmes nègres" written and interpreted by Tzara, Richard

¹⁵ Tristan Tzara, "La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine", in: *Œuvres complètes*, Tome I (1912-1924), ed. Henri Béhar, Paris 1975, 75-84, here 82.

¹⁶ In his *Seven Dada Manifestos*, in: *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell, tr. Ralph Manheim, Cambridge, Mass. 1989, 75-98, here 76.

¹⁷ There seems to be a special fascination of ventilators in the early European avant-garde. See for instance Enrico Prampolini's love play between ventilator and gramophone in *Les Trois Moments* (See: Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre*, Oxford 1998, 451). I would like to thank Günter Berghaus for this reference and for other comments he made on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹⁸ See for instance Blachère, *Les totems d'André Breton*, 31-7; Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 110-27.

Huelsenbeck and Hugo Ball. During the Zurich period, Tzara also published two short texts in the magazine *SIC* on the meaning of Negro art and poetry (“Note 6 sur l’art nègre”, “Note 12 sur la poésie nègre”).¹⁹ At this time, Negro art embodied for Tzara the necessary dada values of spontaneity, intensity, clarity of expression, and a certain simplicity and purity in artistic activity. The latter referred not to the purity of the work of art but to the artist’s state of mind, a playful, naive approach to the creative process.

Tzara’s play “La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine”, which includes the first version of the manifesto, parts of which were performed at Cabaret Voltaire in July 1916, exhibits the same elements of “negro” language. The provocative power in the idea of “l’art nègre sans humanité” is dependent on the stereotype of the African primitive as a monstrous Negro savage, as a negative of Western culture, now seen in a positive light. The mere use of the word *nègre* promised to have shock potential for the dadaists, suggesting a form of creative instinctual energy, spontaneity, intensity of emotion beyond the confines of art and civilization. In the context of the dadaist critique of language and literature, the exotic African primitive stands for an admirable linguistic “Barbarian”, the more or less self-conscious invention of someone for whom language is but a medley of sounds and who could, therefore, renew Western poetry. Similarly, the first lines of “La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine”, recited by a character called Mr. Bleubleu, evoke imaginary Africa by means of sound:

pénètre le désert
creuse en hurlant le chemin dans le sable gluant
écoute la vibration
la sangsue et le staphylin
Mataoi Lounda Ngami avec l’empressement d’un
enfant qui se tue

The words “Mataoi Lounda Ngami” are effective in their simple evocative power, mainly through sound, associating the language of the text with pseudo-African languages and places.

In 1916, Tzara’s use of African words and names were part and parcel of a strategy to return the words to their supposedly basic sonorous components, and thus to place poetry at risk. Some of the African or Oceanic

¹⁹ In the 1963 edition of *Sept manifestes Dada* these two texts were published as part of the “lampisteries” attached to the manifestos. I refer, however, to the original versions included in *Découverte des arts dits primitifs. Suivi de Poèmes nègres*, Paris 2006.

“poèmes nègres” that Tzara translated from German and used in the dadaist *soirées*, or published in the late 1910s in dadaist journals like *Dada* and *Dada Almanach*, were accompanied by abstract poems, like Hugo Ball’s “Karawane”, to emphasize the effect of a rupture in semantic structures. For Tzara, the “African” words, the interspersed cries of men and wild beasts, sounds of canons and motors, and the simultaneity of voices in his sound poems, break down the semantic structures of language, purportedly moving poetry back to the foundations of language, its intuitive sound-qualities, and reintegrate poetry in life. The traditional poetic uses of networks of images, and the narrative imagination through causal links of consecution and consequence, are also jettisoned.

For Marinetti, too, the critique of Western literature by way of Africa extends to a critique of conventional genre distinctions – a question that he tackled explicitly, for instance, in the introductions to his two African novels – and literary conventions, such as semantic rules and the use of metaphor. In both his artist’s book *Les Mots en liberté* (1919), and in the 1912 “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature”, Marinetti quotes Mafarka, who is again portrayed as a storyteller and a poet, to recommend, in all futurist writing, the use of what he called its “nets of imagery”: “To encompass and gather together all that which is most fleeting and elusive in materiality, we have to form *tight networks of images or analogies* that will be hurled into the mysterious ocean of matter” (CW, 109-10). African space, nature and primitive culture, but also warfare in and against Africa, encourages such *networks of images or analogies*. The principle of tight networks of images does not only refer to his novel *Mafarka* but to a description of a desert oasis during the battle of Tripoli, the “melting curves” of the “huge breasts” of the desert, as prime examples of the method.

But to return to Tzara’s first dada manifesto and his early notes on *l’art nègre*: the African primitive was for early Tzara not only one of his main models of rupture but also of affiliation situated on the margins of Western culture – beyond the “European frame of weaknesses” as he puts it here – together with child-like sensibility, madness and the unconscious. The Sub-Saharan primitive, or Oceanic cultures, names that constantly merge in his writings from this time, can be clearly seen only against the European opposite, the stereotype of the rational bourgeois European, who in turn becomes more visible by being contrasted with the primitive. The negro, which Tzara later replaces with the term primitive, is at once the geographical and mental opposite of the West.

In the first dada manifesto and in the notes on “negro” art and poetry from 1917 and 1918, the sources of childhood, madness, the unconscious and the primitive tend to merge into one critique of war torn Europe or the West in general. The emphasis on naïveté, spontaneity and the redis-

covery of childhood is frequently associated with the “nègre”, while the unconscious or instincts that are to be liberated through dadaist practices are shown to have a primitive structure. The idea of the Negro is not exclusively tied to the geographically distant cultures of Africa and Oceania, however. It can be discovered in the Occident as well, as a repressed primitive mental structure.²⁰ Thus we get an image like the Sumatran head of a German child in the beginning of the manifesto – “Dada est notre intensité; qui érige les baïonnettes sans conséquence la tête sumatrale du bébé allemand”²¹ – echoing also the lines of the character of the Director elsewhere in the play “Monsieur Antipyrine” who rejects the rational German mind: “je suis historique/ tu arrives de la Martinique/ nous sommes très intelligents/ et nous ne sommes pas des allemands”.²²

The playful spontaneity of a child, a madman, or the ideal *nègre*, is a central aspect of the dadaist attitude of breaking down rational thought and language into its constituent parts. In this critique, the value of spontaneity reaches the level of an almost spiritual revelation. As Tzara explains in “Note 6 sur l’art nègre”, “negro art” is the art at the beginning of time, “l’art fut dans l’enfance du temps, prière”,²³ which again means that it is like a prayer. The primitive expression that he thus associates with the childhood of humanity and its forgotten forms of spirituality, evokes the vision of a cosmic sliding of all elements – man, moon, plants, metal, stars, fish – into universal oneness (“Qu’on laisse glisser les éléments cosmiques, symétriquement”). The primitive and the child are equally in touch with their affective life as well as with the spiritual nature of man, uncorrupted by Western civilization and its rational classifications, caricatured here among other things by the erased German head. The ideal Negro poetry is not capable for instance of distinguishing between poetry and life since, as Tzara puts it, this poetry lives first and foremost as a function of “dance, religion, music, and work”.²⁴ The same idea of a happy, joyful, spontaneous Negro brother, who may be disrespectful in a jeering manner, emerges in the early notes on Negro art and poetry. The Negro brother does not accept the conventional (read: European) notion of the relation between the mind and the rest of the body but follows his own laws of necessity: “Mon autre frère est naïf et bon et rit. Il mange en Afrique et dans les bracelets des îles océaniques. Il concentre sa vision

²⁰ As revealed in some kinds of European folk art or children’s art. Consider for instance Wassily Kandinsky’s influential *Der blaue Reiter Almanach* (1912).

²¹ Tzara, *Œuvres complètes*, Tome I, 81.

²² Tzara, *Œuvres complètes*, Tome I, 80.

²³ Tzara, *Découverte des arts dits primitives*, 26.

²⁴ Tzara, *Découverte des arts dits primitives*, 28.

sur la tête, la taille en bois de fer, patiemment, et perd le rapport conventionnel entre la tête et le reste du corps".²⁵

Tzara's early image of the ideal negro, as someone who transmits a sense of the playful, fantastic and the creative, a child-like rebel without a rational mind²⁶, is perhaps even more dependent on the inversion of 19th-century Social Darwinist theories on the progress of human societies from the primitive to the modern, than Marinetti's hyperbolic images of the self-sufficient superman. However, what is altogether missing from Marinetti's imagination but present in Tzara's writings, especially when it comes to Tzara's series of later essays on so-called primitive art, is any serious consideration of actual non-European art and poetry and ways of life, as potential sources of knowledge and inspiration. The African primitive also serves Tzara as a means to criticize Occidental anthropocentrism, including the contemporary bias in ethnography towards distinguishing "them" from "us". Also unlike Marinetti's African fiction, Tzara's African primitivism does not involve the construction of African space as a site for violence, and a pretext for declarations of open aggression typical of Italian futurism in general, but remains first and foremost a principle of creativity and spontaneity without any clear projections of primitive space and society.

This serious interest in non-European cultures is perhaps most clearly stated in Tzara's re-evaluation of the discovery of so-called primitive art and the dadaist appropriation of Negro aesthetics in his later essays, especially in "Découverte des arts dits primitifs" and "Sur l'art des peuples africains", which were published in the 1950s. In these writings, Tzara refrains from using a general category of primitive art, affirming instead his interest in the distinction between cultures, while he also restates the dadaist critique of cubist *l'art nègre* as just another form of academism. The main dadaist interest in primitive art and poetry, as Tzara saw it in the 1950s, lay not in the aesthetic forms of non-Western art, nor their function as a manifestation of some intelligence or will, but the quality of the primitive as an expression of the fundamental forces of human life itself. What dada sought in the primitive, then, was the universal primitive structure in affective life: "cette activité poétique dont la racine profonde se confond avec la structure primitive de la vie affective".²⁷ This basic idea of exploring poetic imagination, emotions and consciousness, rather than

²⁵ Tzara, *Découverte des arts dits primitives*, 25.

²⁶ Compare also with the Berlin dadaist Hannah Höch's famous collage "Monument II: Vanity" (1926), which combines a Caucasian nude below the waist with a tribal artifact above as her head, and with the artist's other works in the same vein.

²⁷ Tzara, *Découverte des arts dits primitives*, 32-3.

studying new models of plastic structure, was subsequently transmitted to surrealism.

If we read Tzara's early uses and definitions of *l'art nègre* in the light of his later essays on primitive art, dating from the late 1920s until the mid-1950s, we can trace a line of progression in his thinking that involves the very category of the primitive. In his 1951 essay "Découverte des arts dits primitifs", the notion of primitive art is bracketed (as *so-called* primitive art), or used as a metaphor, since this "art" should not be separated from its social and religious functions, and since the "primitive" is a necessary element within the Western mind as well, as its basic affective structure. Tzara employs the concept of *l'art nègre*, in turn, as a historical generalization, pointing specifically to the cubist appropriations that remove the primitive object from its social and religious context. Tzara thus makes one kind of primitivism, not only the cubist aesthetic interest in non-European "pure" forms but also the dadaist shock-effect of the headless noble savage, branch off in the direction of a much more complex idea of primitive mentality, or a primitive emotional structure, which demands expression and spans human consciousness in all cultures. The replacement of "Negro art without humanity" from the original 1916 version of the manifesto with a "ventilator" can perhaps be seen as an early indication of this re-emphasis.

In his translations from German into French and his adaption of "poèmes nègres" from respectable ethnographic sources like the Swiss journal *Anthropos*,²⁸ Tzara's work bears witness to the existence of actual African poetry and artistic traditions. His personal collection of non-European art and his later essays also bear witness to his serious interest and his view of the primitive as a positive source of knowledge. The notion of European culture was part and parcel of this investigation. Tzara argues in his essays that a wider notion of civilization is a necessary outcome of the encounter with and appreciation of other traditions.²⁹ His growing interest in ethnographic findings and in the distinctions between different non-European cultures, however, is in itself symptomatic of the avant-garde impulse to break down the confines of traditional art and poetry, to move art out of its compartment as art, and back to its more "archaic" social and religious functions. In this respect, it is important to emphasize that especially Tzara's early African poems, chants and ritual masks, epitomized by the figure of the headless and mindless Negro

²⁸ The other source was Jan Ephraim, owner of the Meierei which had hosted the *Cabaret Pantagruel* and later the *Cabaret Voltaire*. I owe this reference to Günter Berghaus.

²⁹ Tzara, *Découverte des arts dits primitives*, 60.

brother, served mainly as a means of interrupting artistic conventions and norms. The ethnologist Jean Jamin, in fact, pointed out that while in the 1920s and 30s there were surrealists and others close to them, such as Tzara, who acquired substantial ethnographic knowledge, they did so for operational purposes, specifically in order to use this knowledge to transgress artistic boundaries and to disorientate everyday language.³⁰ The image of the *nègre* that Tzara takes up and (re)invents many times during his career, which originally meant the Africa of sarcasm, subversion, disorder and derision, is not fundamentally different from that of the era of *l'art nègre* in the sense that it has nothing to do with the economic, social and symbolic realities in the African colonies at the time. Awareness of these realities only appeared much later, as we now know.

Conclusion

For both Marinetti and Tzara, an interest in the exotic African primitive is pervasive throughout much of their work. Many of the main qualities that they attributed to Africa are also analogous, especially the image of Africa as intensity, as an intensifier of artistic vision and the power of poetic analogy, an intensifier of our sense of reality and life. What is also to a large extent similar in their conception is that the African primitive constituted a geographically distant way of life or mentality, with which they would associate, in particular, closeness to nature and human instincts, uninhibited sexuality, intensity of emotion, and occult spirituality. As a means of provocation this image is indebted to and openly taps into the collective European fascination with the black African as a resident of a world of terror, violence and the irrational.³¹

While this "African" intensity suggested to them a model and a means of transgression and revitalization, it also threw into relief the West, with which they disagreed. For Marinetti and Tzara, this Europe has the same basic features: conventionality and tradition, passivity, weakness, old-age, abstract academic distinctions, and suffocating forms of rationality. Marinetti and Tzara basically share the same cultural frustration with what they saw as a feeble, pessimistic and corrupt Europe. This is true of many

³⁰ Jean Jamin, "L'ethnographie mode d'emploi. De quelques rapports de l'ethnologie avec la malaise dans la civilisation", in: *Le mal et la douleur*, ed. Jacques Hainard et Roland Kaehr, Neuchâtel 1986, 45-79, here 57.

³¹ See Marie-Denise Shelton, "Le Monde noir dans la littérature dadaïste et surréaliste", in: *The French Review*, 3, February 1954, 320-8, here 323.

other leading avantgardists, amongst them Huelsenbeck with his 1920 “History of Dadaism”:

there was something in the air of the ageing Europe that demanded an attempt, by a last effort of the will, deriving its impulse from the knowledge of all cultures and artistic techniques, to return to the old intuitive possibilities, from which, it was realized, the various styles had emanated hundreds of years ago.³²

Marinetti’s and Tzara’s “Africas” are a response to such a frustration. Their Africas function as an imaginary agency that made the West look more distinct and Occidental; the sorry outcome of progress gone wrong or failed morality. This artificial Africa, in all senses of the term, helped them to better attack and reject the idea of Europe.

Major differences, however, can be found in their perception of the exotic African primitive as a means to subvert and reinvigorate Western values. What makes Marinetti stand apart is perhaps not so much his personal involvement in colonial realities through engagement in war, journalism and politics, even if these elements make him a key figure in Italian colonial literature³³, but his way of fusing the technological with the primitive, the glorification of physical violence and war in the African zone. Marinetti had no evident interest in any serious investigation of the affinity that he envisaged so frequently between futurism and the African rebels of his fiction. Much more prominently and unambiguously than in Tzara, therefore, Africa emerges in his writing as a source of a quasi-

³² Richard Huelsenbeck, “En avant Dada: A History of Dadaism”, in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, 23-48, here 32.

³³ Marinetti’s ample use of African topics in his writing, and his involvement in colonial wars in Libya and Abyssinia, makes his oeuvre a focal point of interest in the relation between the avant-gardes and Italian colonialism. While working as a war correspondent for the French *L’Intransigeant* of Paris, the battle of Tripoli between Turkey and Italy in 1911 inspired the novel *Le Monoplan du Pape* (*The Pope’s Monoplane. Political Novel in Free Verse*, 1912). Later, Marinetti would call this battle “the most beautiful aesthetic spectacle of my life” (The original reads: “il più bello spettacolo estetico della mia vita”, see F. T. Marinetti-Aldo Palazzeschi: *Carteggio*, ed. Paolo Prestigiacomo, Milan 1978, 73). The various sensations offered by the African desert and scorching sun, topics to which Marinetti returns throughout his career, are also described in the sound poem “Dune, parole in libertà” (1914). The same poem displays the author’s interest in quasi-African sounds and names, a shared inspiration with many later Dadaists. His travel book *Il fascino dell’Egitto* (1933) displays an interest in the pleasures of contemporary Egypt. Finally, the poem *Il Poema Africano della Divisione “28 Ottobre”* (1937) depicts the Italo-Abyssinian war of 1935-36. At the age of sixty, Marinetti volunteered in Mussolini’s Abyssinian campaign and he dedicated this poem to the courage of the soldiers and the desire of the war machines to be the centre of attention.

mystical belief in regeneration, in accordance with the basic avant-garde myth of historical renewal.

The African in Marinetti's writing is always idealized, characterized by the image of infinite rebirth and the free reign of fulfilled desire, exemplified by the fantastically easy exchange of human qualities, technology and nature, but also threatened by the possibility of a total erasure of differences. The figure of the African futurist rebel, who promises reconciliation between technology and the instinctual "nature" of man, is the outcome of a simple overturning of values associated with the 19th-century image of the African primitive, or the primitive within. While technology can intensify futurist poetry's "work of analogy", therefore, African nature – Sun, heat, desert, vegetation, animals, the Negro body – and the reshaping of that nature can expand poetic associations. The technological element that, in particular, penetrates Africa in the visions of his prose-fiction is always glorified and profoundly male, a guarantee against nature, which might otherwise, as if in itself, be too feminine.

While Tzara, on the other hand, was suspicious, especially in his essays on so-called primitive art, of Western biases in ethnographic research and dubious ideas of "primitive mentality" that presumed to be able to distinguish "them" from "us",³⁴ he nevertheless made use of the contemporary ethnographic distinction between primitive mythopoeic sensibility and civilized abstract intelligence. New ethnographic research and ideas concerning different mentalities and alternative civilizations made it possible for him to imagine other forms of reasoning, psychology and art, and to forge an effective synthesis between the primitive and the modern. Yet, for Tzara, the possibility of intercultural imitation also necessarily involved the destruction of European anthropocentric aesthetics by means of sarcasm, irony and jeering disrespect for nationalism in Europe. Contrary to Marinetti, Tzara rejected the idea that technological or material progress could be associated with any form of artistic progress. Instead of glorification, he poked fun at machines, as is implied by the alteration that he made to the first dadaist manifesto, replacing the "negro without humanity" with a pleasure-inducing ventilator.

³⁴ Including especially Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's notion of pre-logic *primitive mentality* put forward in *La Mentalité primitive* (1922). On the surrealist critique of Lévy-Bruhl see Sabot, "Primitivisme et surrealism".

Seeing African Sculpture: Carl Einstein's "ethnographie du blanc"

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With the beginning of the 20th century, a definition of "Europa" as a culture unified under the hegemony of *literature as an institution* for a *universal education* of man had become unthinkable for the international avant-garde. "Europe" had become impossible without reviewing the boundaries toward the "otherness" of extra-European cultures. These boundaries had to be radically revised beyond the denigrating stereotypes of 18th/19th-century philosophy, as in the now infamous case of Hegel's view of "Africa" as not sharing in the universal human experience, as still being arrested in the state of nature,¹ and 19th-century European anthropology which had relegated "primitive" artifacts to collections of "fetishes" in the museum. So when we talk of historical "African sculpture" today in 2009, we are at best at par with the European avant-garde's understanding of the issues during the first decades of the 20th century. Or is it not true that our view of "African sculpture" is still fixed on the very same masks which Matisse, Braque and Picasso collected from the Parisian Marché aux Puces around 1906? At least we appear to be still assessing these very masks in the terms of a debate that reemerged in the mid-1980s on the occasion of the landmark MOMA exhibit *Primitivism in 20th Century Art. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* which addressed such affinity programmatically, often with painstaking studies of direct influences of the tribal on the modernist work, as based on shared *formal* creativity.

Rather than re-debating the debate that has trailed this 1984 exhibition for decades, I would like to add here a dimension that goes beyond its by now almost too well-known arguments of a universalist "natural affinity"²

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree, New York 1956, 93, 99.

² William Rubin, "Introduction", in: *Primitivism in 20th Century Art. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, 2 vols., ed. William Rubin, New York 1984, Vol. 1, 11. The term "elective affinity" (11), which remains without any definition, in the course of the essay is dropped in favor of a "natural" affinity (e.g. 73). Though on first sight, indeed, intriguingly plausible in terms of formal correspondences, in view of the different processes of individual versus collective

of modernist to Primitive creativity, symptomatic of a distinctly Euro-centric disposition. My argument will converge with Carl Einstein's and Michel Leiris' ethnographic assessment of that relation as one of a "common differentness"³ (or, as Lévy-Strauss put it quite poetically, of "fragile flowers of difference") when viewed against the culture of Western subjectivity. This idea, that a difference can be shared on otherwise common ground, leads me first to the notion of an "elective affinity". The latter, deriving from the natural sciences, would of course, imply more than a mere influence arising from the masks collected in Paris, also more than taking recourse to the characteristically Western idea and ideal of a transcendental aesthetic play with forms as a universal. The term "elective affinity" would mean less than a free choice and more than fascination, indeed, an obsession of the modern mind with the Primitive. The scientist Torbern Bergmann in *De attractionibus electivis* (1775) made an argument for a remarkable affinity of certain elemental dissimilar material elements to each other. His analysis, it is worthwhile to note, has still not been replaced in today's material sciences, in, for example, the emerging fields of nanomagnetism and spintronics which are interested in the development of energy sources in the form of minimalist chips. Experimentation in these fields is very much based on highly productive "chance encounters" of elemental affinities beyond calculations (a veritable surprise to the humanist mind). Goethe, of course, had Bergmann's treatise in mind when he wrote his *Elective Affinities* (1809), a novel about a complex love affair of switching relations triggered by insurmountable attraction. Bergmann's tract gave a description of chemicals leaving their current alloys, when in contact with specific, indefinably more "attractive", albeit *dissimilar* others in order to form a new amalgam. By analogy, the term, translated into our aesthetic context, which is defined by a crisis

productions one can neither talk of "kinship" between tribal art and modernist primitivism. The condition of kinship would, moreover, imply a genealogical relation from the "Primitive" to the "modern", which, after all, is not the point of view of the exhibit. James Clifford ("Histories of the Tribal and the Modern", in: *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge 1988) argues against Rubin's notion of an affinity of the primitive and the modern creative mind from the point of view of Leiris' assessment of a "common differentness" between various regional practices in Africa as well as in relation to representational "artistic modes that dominated in the West from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century" (192). Such differentiated critical understanding serves better than the ahistorical, culture-blind employment of a "kinship term" like "affinity". For the issues of the debate in the wake of the 1984 MOMA exhibit, see most prominently Yve-Alain Bois, "La Pensée Sauvage", in: *Art in America*, 4, 1985, 178-89, and Jack Flam & Miriam Deutch (eds.), *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art. A Documentary History*, Berkeley 2003, 311-413.

³ Michel Leiris, "The African Negroes and the Arts of Carving and Sculpture", in: *Interrelations of Cultures*, Westport 1953, 316-51.

of Western subjectivity and its paradigm of representation, would refer to comparable innovation. Certain intuitive formal energies that are part of any aesthetic process, once having come into contact with aperspectival solutions of space perception, such as presented by much of Primitive art, would quasi-spontaneously generate alternative models of perception. Cultural innovation, of course, is never fully explicable (in fact, as such it behaves for the culture theorist like nanomagnetic innovation for the scientist). At any rate, jettisoned in the collapse of classical models of vision around 1900 is the dominant rationalist point of view of the central perspective, of “observing seeing” as Carl Einstein put it.⁴ “Observing seeing” as the result of the suppression of the physiological conditions of seeing into an unconscious⁵ will be subject to a major revision when more or less unconscious corporeal and intuitive formal processes find each other free of the subject’s control. Ultimately, we are witnessing a *paradigm change*, the very irreversible change that occurred from a culture of representation to 20th-century modernism, in which change the reception of African sculpture by European artists played a significant role.

Carl Einstein, poet, critic, and art theorist, was the author of a first major treatise on African sculpture (*Negerplastik*, 1915) and was later, together with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, chief contributor of essays on modernist primitivism to *Documents* (Paris, 1929/30), a journal for “Archéologie, Beaux-Arts, Ethnographie, Variétés”. Einstein’s epistemological model of the affinity of the tribal and modern (which I here extend with reference also to his later hitherto altogether underexposed fragmentary reflections on “epistemology and art criticism” from the 1930s⁶) constitutes a single abandonment of transcendental Kantian aesthetics, at its base a Nietzschean “physiology of aesthetics”. Most basically speaking, he addressed the central perspective as the Western “wissenschaftliche Fetisch” (scientific fetish),⁷ moreover as a “Sonderfall” (exception) in the history of seeing.⁸ Hence his extensive critique of this “fetish” of subjectivity with its “comfortable grammar of seeing”, which established “seeing

⁴ Carl Einstein, *Georges Braque* (1934), in: *Werke*, Vol. 3, ed. Marion Schmid and Liliane Meffre, Berlin 1985, 202 – French translation, by M.E. Zipruth, published by Editions Chronique du Jour, Paris 1934.

⁵ Cf. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990.

⁶ Carl Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4: *Texte aus dem Nachlass I*, ed. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar, Berlin 1992, 121-497.

⁷ Carl Einstein, “Methodische Aphorismen” (1929), in: *Werke*, Vol. 3, 14.

⁸ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 470.

as a rational reasonable activity",⁹ moreover as developmental apex for an entire culture. Here is the core of his attempt to un- and recover concrete, "immediate" visual *experience* (*Bildsehen*) from the culture of "metaphor".¹⁰ As the art theorist frames it in his idiosyncratic terms, experience is obstructed by our culture's metaphorical constructs of "transvisual contents and objects"¹¹ ranging from religious to scientific *Weltbilder* (world views). As relatively late forms of abstractions, late in terms of man's cultural history and the differentiation of mental epistemological processes, these are, as Einstein puts it, "invisible".¹² In fact, they are phantoms compared with the experience of a primary *Bildsehen* (image vision)¹³ that underlies all experience, yet has been suppressed. It is thus the goal of the historical avant-garde, as Einstein writes in his treatise *Georges Braque*, which looks back on cubism and surrealist developments from the standpoint of the early 1930s, to undo the culture of metaphor.

Correspondingly, in all of Einstein's writings the grand avant-garde claim to "change the world" is broken down into its epistemological steps, with a view toward fundamentally undoing the modern rift between physis, conceptual, and meta-physical constructs. It is first the function of analytical cubist images to "alter the function of seeing itself by demonstrating that subject- vs. object-based constructs of an assumed stable totality", call it "reality", "are merely the end phases of unstable processes".¹⁴ Subsequently surrealist texts, paintings and objects are seen to subvert these abstractions, and to replace the distance of metaphor by the nearness of metamorphosis. In other words, he charges the French avant-garde with the creation of "new objects", of "visual myths" as the means toward producing a fundamental change of experience, namely of inter-subjective "immediacy" and presence.¹⁵ We are thus dealing with what Einstein calls his "ethnologie de l'homme blanc",¹⁶ an area of longstand-

⁹ Einstein, *Georges Braque*, 243f.

¹⁰ *Werke*, Vol. 4, 392. The issue of "seeing" as a cultural construct is inherently tied to a collective memory. It is the collective memory that supplies, through *metaphors*, ready-made grids or frames, interpretation to a fluidly formal physiological process. This is the case in both the Primitive as well as the Western experience, of course, however differently articulated.

¹¹ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 368.

¹² Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 306.

¹³ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 392; "Bildsehen" is also addressed as "optisches Bewusstsein", meaning a psycho-physiological process of apperception rather than mere physiological optical conditions à la Ernst Mach.

¹⁴ Einstein, *Georges Braque*, 204; 227.

¹⁵ Einstein, *Georges Braque*, 204.

¹⁶ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 323.

ing interest, proceeding along with and complementary to his political activism which made him part of the postwar Berlin dada scene and its critique of the consciousness industry. His ethnological episteme will likewise turn to tribal culture as a construct through icons, fetishes, and gods as the Primitive “transvisual”. At the core of tribal culture is the construction of a tribal identity through the sacrifice of the individual body (whereas modernist primitivism sacrifices an individual point of view). The tribal body, in turn, is produced in the language of ritual. The tattooing and dancing of the collective body constitutes the performance of a collective “fixed memory” in the forms of “fixed ecstasy” (collective ecstasy as a stepping out of a “self”).¹⁷ As such both Western rational constructs and Primitive myths, while on opposite poles, are “hallucinatory”,¹⁸ with the forms of myth being more complex than the “scientific concept of the real”.¹⁹ Shared are “hallucinatory” energies, which have been repressed by the culture of subjectivity or which had been channeled by the priests of “ascetic training” into religious taboos and the strict order of ritual.²⁰ In both modernist primitivism and tribal production, it is (for Einstein as the Western theorist) the aesthetic work that in its “hallucinatory” and “constructive” form recovers vision as an “imagined Gestalt” (*imaginierte Gestalt*).²¹ Its “hallucinatory-constructive” dimension, as it were, redeems experience from the mere “optical” as well as the conceptual. The issue, of course, will be reflected in later academic art theory with the ongoing discussion of a “re-membling” vs. “seeing seeing”.²²

Traditional African aesthetic productions have habitually been viewed as if *before* the central perspective. In a way then they have been treated like the productions of “the child”; even when denied, such patronizing comparison remained unconsciously. In fact, childlike creativity as spontaneity, as such *before* perspective as constructing conceptual space, became a topos, for example, in German expressionism. As we here really cannot properly speak of an experience *before* perspective, we neither can speak of an “absence” of perspective in African art, as also that criterion of negation would still belong to a cultural territory that is proper to Europe

¹⁷ Carl Einstein, *Negerplastik*, in: *Werke*, Vol. 1, Berlin 1980, ed. Rolf-Peter Baacke and Jens Kwasny. English translation, see: Carl Einstein, “Negro Sculpture”, tr. Charles W. Haxthausen and Sebastian Zeidler, in: *October*, 107, Einstein special issue, 2004, 137-8.

¹⁸ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 435.

¹⁹ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 306.

²⁰ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 326.

²¹ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 326.

²² See for example Max Imdahl, *Bildautonomie und Wirklichkeit: Zur theoretischen Begründung moderner Malerei*, Mittenwald 1981, 9: “wiedererkennendes” vs. “sehendes Sehen”.

since the Renaissance. If we want to enter critically such an epistemic space that is not *before* or *after* perspective but, as it were, a *zero zone of apperception*, a space beyond the reach of narrative and representation, we will have to develop an understanding of an *extra-perspectival zone* of experience. Walter Benjamin would address such a critical space in the case of surrealist productions in his turning-point essay "Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" from 1929 in his terms as a *hundred-per-cent body and image zone*. As a space of psycho-corporeal energies, it would paradigmatically disrupt Western *literary culture* as hinging on the subjectivity of metaphor.

It is, however, Carl Einstein who has much less dramatically and in more developed epistemological terms already explored such a *body and image zone* over a decade earlier in his *Negerplastik*, published in wartime 1915. It is at this point that the critic divides himself into the ethnologist, on the one hand, and the theorist of aesthetics, on the other. In tribal culture, African sculpture is identified with the absolute: "the statue *is* the god". As such there is no privileged point of view outside of, external to, the sculpture (any other point of view would be sacrilege vis-à-vis the sacred). Sacral forms as the presence of the sacred are thus not an expression of the "invisible" as the ineffable, rather they are in this sense invisible, or "transvisual" to normative as well as aesthetic perception. Nevertheless, in his many essays on Primitive art, African or Oceanic, for *Documents* and other journals, Einstein displays a great deal of interest in and fascination with the very details of a ritual Ekoi dance mask, of a Bapindi mask, a Wangata phallus pole, skull cups of the Ethiopian Bakuba, headless rabbits under the chairs of the Kamerun, Islam-influenced terra cotta dolls of the Wakusamo, etc. He is, indeed, fascinated, attracted by these tribal objects as various "phenotypes" of a vast and colorful *Ausdruckswelt* (world of expression, as his longtime relation Gottfried Benn put it). Obviously, in spite of their considerable diversity, these various phenotypes all speak of an underlying genotype experience of religious provenance.

The European art theorist, on the other hand, perceived the tribal absolute of a "god" rather as an *aesthetic* construct. In the experience of African sculpture as a totality, every aspect of the work as a *Gebilde* (image construct), Einstein theorizes, is a function of its "points centrales" (sic). In contrast to the defined and defining *Erlebnis* (experience) of optical subjectivity, there is no single experiential moment of "points centrals" (as the singular is a construct of the subject), rather there is omnipresence. Einstein here significantly departs from an early influence, Ernst Mach's *Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen* (Analysis of the Senses and the Relation of the Physical to the Psycho-

logical, 1886), which already reviewed the idea of an autonomous subject as fiction, as a meta-physical notion. For Mach's analysis of senses, the "subject" is a mask of the corporeal process in which the relation of the various senses from touch to hearing and seeing basically coalesce in an aggregate of perceptual functions that are reflected and constructed as the *Ich* (I/self). In a letter to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, concerning their mutual interest in cubism, Einstein will acknowledge and simultaneously critique Mach for having little insight into the linguistic dimension involved. The complementary processes of apperceptions, the mental reflections that generate the production of semiotic effects from the corporeal base, ultimately of symbolic, linguistic relations, he writes, were outside of Mach's narrowly physiological optical scope.²³ Of course, it can only be alluded to here that sensations and perceptions are always already taking part in larger cultural associations of a collective memory. Stated in the terms of what I call Einstein's *anthropological poetics*, these result in "trans-visual" constructs of the self, of collective myths, icons, idols and gods, as such multi-dimensionally fictitious, as part of longstanding traditions.²⁴

The plural term "points centrals" referring to the formal movements of a *Sehakt* as a *Bewegungsakt*²⁵ (act of seeing as an act of movement) within a closed sculpture of a fixed totality appears to be an impossible concept, consciously and pointedly chosen as such by Einstein. It is likely that he adapted it from Hedwig Fechheimer's *Die Plastik der Ägypter* (1914), the most direct precedent and influence on his treatise on African sculpture.²⁶ In her book, Fechheimer had identified the principle of an "integration plastique" as the common denominator between Egyptian sacral art work and the productions of modern European painters and sculptors. Thus she quotes from Paul Cézanne's view of nature as a composite of elementary forms such as the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, every side of an object or a plane tending toward "un point central".²⁷ In our terms, Cézanne's "point central" cannot be confused with the central perspective of subjectivity which superimposes its interest unto the object. Rather it refers, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty observed, to a much less certain, let alone self-assured, yet incomparably more creative point of view of a "lived perspective", in which the "lived object" is a "center" which

²³ Carl Einstein *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler Correspondence 1921-1939*, ed. Liliane Meffre, Marseille 1993, 355; 144.

²⁴ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 329, 392. See also endnote 10.

²⁵ Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 256; 255.

²⁶ Cf. Klaus H. Kiefer, *Diskurswandel im Werk Carl Einsteins. Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Geschichte der europäischen Avantgarde*, Tübingen 1994, 163ff.

²⁷ Hedwig Fechheimer, *Die Plastik der Ägypter* (1914), 4th edition, Berlin 1922, 4.

radiates "the insurpassable plentitude, which for us is the definition of the real". Hence the multitude of forms as "partial views" that must be "welded together", "reunited".²⁸ As if Einstein needed another clue for his treatise, Fechheimer subsequently alludes (albeit not altogether clearly) to an affinity between the composition method involving straight lines and curves of Egyptian relief sculptors and cubist designs.²⁹ More specifically, Einstein's rather stunning use of the plural "points centrals" for African sculpture as a major non-European instance of a "Integration des Plastischen" (the German for Fechheimer's French term),³⁰ allows for a "strong", yet nevertheless relative independence (*Verselbstständigung*)³¹ of the parts of a sculpture, partial views which may be as distinct as the head, breasts, arms or the feet of a statue. "Points centrals" here are thus perceived as formal *Funktionszentren* (functional centers) which as such always already mediate "the complete identity of the singular optical moment"³² with the totality of the presentation (*Anschauung*). One might compare and contrast Einstein's insights with Merleau-Ponty's reference to Cézanne's welding together of "partial views". Einstein, however, was more interested in the unity of experience and form than in "plentitude". The resulting totality of "the cubic as form" is always already the realization of the singular; it thus goes beyond a *conceptual definition* of the particular.³³ The stasis of complete form has absorbed the act of seeing (*Sehakt*) as one of movement, namely the movement of the eyes in the process of perceptions as apperceptions, which Einstein would call *Bildsehen* (image seeing).³⁴ As in the case of his adapting Fechheimer's understanding of Cézanne's "integration plastique" for his view of African sculpture, Einstein here condenses, as it were, an entire chapter of Adolf Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (1893), the observations on "Vision and Movement", into a formal identity and immediacy of what the latter had discussed as "two faculties of distinct character": "One consisting in visual perception at a glance with the eye at rest, the other in a number of more complex perceptions made up of visual and kinesthetic factors which result from a series of movements. All our knowledge concerning the plastic nature of objects is derived

²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt", in: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Evanston 1993, 65, 67.

²⁹ Fechheimer, *Die Plastik der Ägypter*, 4.

³⁰ Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 258.

³¹ Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 258.

³² Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 258: "vollständige Identität des Einzeloptischen"

³³ Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 256: "Verwirklichung des Einzelnen"

³⁴ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 392.

originally from movements which we make either with eyes or with hands".³⁵ In fact, while one has usually read Einstein's treatise in terms of his focus on the formal stasis of the "cubic" experience, one will have to read it also from the point of view of Einstein's corresponding, equally developed concern with what Hildebrand here addresses as "kinesthetic factors" and "kinesthetic ideas".

Einstein's use of the plural "points centrals"³⁶ as opposed to the one-point perspective may, indeed, have been reinforced by his close-up experience of Braque's and Picasso's early cubist experiments with multi-perspective simultaneity. Einstein now does address the issue of a simultaneity of seeing as a powerful quasi-"*autistic*" process of psychocorporeal visual movements.³⁷ Thus for the cubist moment there is no imposition of the memory of a guiding subject's view, which would see in terms of "volume", "volume" as the sum of separate, temporal, optical steps,³⁸ in the categories of a dividing point of view (which Hildebrand retained for "the cubic" of Western sculpture as "three-dimensional or solid form"³⁹). Rather, we are dealing with the embodiment of the formal experience of presence as visually omnipresent. As the body itself, such experience does not have a center. In other words, within such a space of, indeed, "a hundred percent body and image zone", every point of view of the experiential process is as "central" as any other. Here physis and image are, indeed, so much of one process that, as Benjamin would see it in the instance of surrealism, "there (is) no chink left for penny-in-the-slot called 'meaning'".⁴⁰

This is the "extra-perspectival" space that I address as without a *before* or *after*. However, as such it is also a space of *play*. And it is the very space in which Einstein maintains a point of view that is to, after all, quite robustly – not as cautiously as Lévy-Strauss' talk of "fragile flowers of difference" – establish the divergence between tribal ritual and modernist aesthetic experience, albeit a difference on common grounds as the base

³⁵ Adolf Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, tr. Max Meyer and Robert Morris Ogden with the author's co-operation, New York-Leipzig-London 1907, 23f.

³⁶ At any rate, the term "points centrals" designates something quite different from Husserl's "stigma", which refers to the single "Augenblick" as an "infinitely contracting point" or "sourcepoint" (Quellpunkt). Rather "points centrales" are of the experience of series of "Augenblicke".

³⁷ See "Anmerkungen zum Kubismus", in: *Werke*, Vol. 3, 32 – "Notes on Cubism", in: *October*, 107, 2004, 158-68.

³⁸ "Anmerkungen zum Kubismus", 32.

³⁹ Adolf Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, 23f.

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia", in: *Reflections*, tr. Edmund Jephcott; ed. and introduced by Peter Demetz, New York 1986, 179.

of an "elective affinity". In his 1929 "Notes on Cubism", Einstein addresses play as the movens of a European creative identity in obvious differentiation from the fixed conventions of tribal ritual. The European experience is one of freedom from societal conventions expressed in "inventive, creative images, vitalizing forces no longer of the ghosts and spirits but of human beings. One does no longer work after the image of the gods, but according to one's own visions (*Vorstellungen*). This is characteristic for the visually active human being who creates its own universe refusing to be the slave of forms given".⁴¹ Obviously, here Einstein reconnects modernist avant-garde creativity with a central European notion of human freedom being expressed and fulfilled in the creativity of play (not withstanding Einstein's fundamental differences with Friedrich Schiller's transcendental aesthetics). By contrast, tribal man is after all essentially defined by the unchangeable laws and fixed forms of ritual. Even though the product of a *Sehakt* as a *Bewegungsakt* – an act of seeing as an act of movement – African sculpture nevertheless constitutes an "ungenetic, unconditional result [...] since all movement has been absorbed".⁴² It is this point of the freezing or "fixation"⁴³ of play as movement into stasis which later is valorized throughout the argumentation of the entire essay (whereas from the point of view of their frequency, the terms of movement and terms of stasis in the essay actually balance each other). This point of valorizing stasis essentially defines the intersection between Einstein the aesthetic theorist and Einstein the ethnologist. The former, most obviously with a keen competitive eye on contemporary developments in European art criticism from Alois Riegl to Wilhelm Worringer, wanted to bring to understanding sculpture a pure form of seeing, meaning as unspoiled by a traditional dominance of a *frontal pictorial* as a perspectival aspect relating the sculpture to the external agency of the contemplating subject. By which he critiqued the quasi-narrative dimension of the *Malerische* (pictorial) which Hildebrand typically

⁴¹ Einstein, "Anmerkungen zum Kubismus", 35: "erfinderische Bilder [...] belebende Kraefte nicht mehr von den Geistern, sondern von den Menschen kommen. Man arbeitet nicht mehr nach dem Bild der Goetter, sondern nach seinen eigenen Vorstellungen [...]. Merkmal des visuell aktiven Menschen, der sich sein Universum selbst schafft und der sich weigert, der Sklave gegebener Formen zu sein".

⁴² Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 259 ("ungenetisches, unbedingtes Ergebnis [...] da die Bewegung absorbiert ist"). For Einstein's insistence on a "nouvelle réalité formelle autonome" (Meffre) and the "formal realism" of African sculpture, see Liliane Meffre, *Carl Einstein Et La Problematique Des Avant-Gardes Dans Les Arts Plastiques*, Berne 1989, 57; Sebastian Zeidler, "Totality against a Subject: Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*", in: *October*, 107, 2004, 15-46.

⁴³ Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 259.

admitted into the language of contemporaneous Western sculpture. It is thus also for the goal of revising and revolutionizing the European understanding of the structure and function of sculpture that the aesthetic theorist turns to the ethnological phenomenon of African sculpture. In other words, for Einstein, modernist primitivism was to displace the distance of individual contemplation at the core of European *Bildung* as education of the individual, by, as it were, the *Bildung* (imaging) of intersubjective experience as lived presence.

His turn to African sculpture, together with dance, mask, and tattoo, as lived in ritual communality was part of his fundamental critique of the European cult of optical illusion as distance and hiding from experience. This moment of crisis explains how Carl Einstein in the text of 1915 should manifest in himself a kind of *elective affinity*, always already one of tension, between the theorist of the aesthetic object and the ethnologist of tribal vision. In other words, the European aesthetic theorist is not looking further at the “kinesthetic” within the corporeal space of African sculpture as *play*, because the European ethnologist turning in the treatise to “Religion and African Art” and “Masks and Related Issues” is interested in sacral tribal art being received *collectively* in terms of the static “transvisual”. In which instance, Joyce Cheng, illuminating a hitherto altogether unexposed, yet equally significant dimension of the treatise, has pointed out, the aesthetic structure of the sculpture stays concealed to the practice and experience of worshipping the sculpture as “the god”. In the dark for instance, at any rate under ritual circumstances in which the sculpture is not viewed at all, let alone as a sculpture, the sculpture “is the god”.⁴⁴ In terms of that predominant religious function of African sculpture, one can even go as far as claim that the “interest of this earlier text [...] lies rather in its attempt to theorize the link between form and function, going so far as to suggest that the most formally rigorous art might have resulted from devotional contexts where the object remains invisible, absconded or only partially or irregularly exhibited”.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it is at least equally important to point out, that had Einstein wanted to pursue the form-ritual question involved, he would have had to also further deal with the underlying “kinesthetic ideas”. He would have had to deal ethnologically, first of all, with the polytheistic context of African sculptures, as such already alive with a series of gods as a series of

⁴⁴ *Negerplastik*, 253.

⁴⁵ Joyce Cheng, “Immanence Out of Sight: Formal Rigor and Ritual Function in Carl Einstein’s *Negerplastik*”, in: *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 55-6, Spring/Autumn 2009, special issue “Absconding Objects”, ed. by Francesco Pellizzi (forthcoming).

metamorphotic relations, on the basis of which Nietzsche had argued – in the instance of the colorful variety of the Greek gods against Judeo-Christian monotheism at the basis of the Western genealogy of morals. Moreover, he would have had to concern himself with *play* in a structural relation to *ritual* as a *collective* phenomenon, in other words not only with the cult value of fixed form but also with the cult value of movement. In tribal ritual, the ambiguity and the transgressiveness of play is always already excluded, at best only allowed marginally as parody, as the carnivalesque, but never as a purpose in and by itself. Aby Warburg, for example, would observe in his 1923 Kreuzlingen lecture on "Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America", that the elements of the grotesque and the bawdy, or vulgar are played out, off-stage as it were, when the dancers unmask themselves after the ritual performance. After all, off-stage antics are staged for balancing the ritual's content-oriented religious seriousness and its strict formal prohibitions.⁴⁶ Likewise Roger Cailliois will point to the parodic clowning of the odd Navajo dancer in rags playing with and shooting arrows into his fox tail in antidote to the masked dancers' performance of *being* the divinities.⁴⁷ Einstein's *Documents* collaborator, Michel Leiris, would analyze in the early 1930s, as a participant ethnographer of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, aspects of the *theatricality* of play in sacral tribal performances such as the practice of *zâr*, a cult of possession, within the Durkheimian tradition of understanding effervescence as the performed sacred.⁴⁸ In these cases, ritual as well as play would be defined as each having their own marked and separate space. Yet, they would stand in a complementary relation to each other, in effect of closest affinity. Which is to say that Einstein the ethnologist, now in terms of an "ethnographie du blanc", would have had to fundamentally review the *transcendentalist* notion of play in a longstanding tradition from Friedrich Schiller's definition of the aesthetic state. Schiller had defined such as an individual state in which the *Spieltrieb* (urge of play) cancels the interests of the *Stofftrieb* (material urge) and the *Formtrieb* (urge to form). At that state man is *Null* (zero),⁴⁹ reaching a moment of a fulfilled equilibrium and disinterestedness as freedom from all external determinants. That would have meant for Einstein to critique a European tradition that had raised the concept of "play" as the fullest measure of *individual* experience

⁴⁶ Aby M. Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, tr. with an interpretive essay by Michael P. Steinberg, Ithaca-London 1995, 1-55.

⁴⁷ Roger Cailliois, *Man Play and Games*, New York 1961, 139.

⁴⁸ See Michel Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Etheopiens de Gondar*, Paris 1958.

⁴⁹ Cf., Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters*, ed. and tr. Elizabeth Wilkinson & L.A. Willoughby, Oxford 1986, 144.

to that of a universal for “mankind” – “mankind” understood in its own Eurocentric image. Symptomatic for a culture that is split between the hegemony of the concept and the aesthetic as a non-conceptual ideal, the European mind had given “aesthetic play”, a phenomenon, which ultimately resists definition, the quasi-monumentalist status of a universal authority: *homo ludens*. Moreover, the ideal of freedom in play had stayed connected to the Kantian idea and ideal of beauty as a state of disinterestedness. Such an ideal of an aesthetic education of man, apart from relatively insignificant naturalist circles in Germany, was, of course, still dominant during the years of a growing conflict between the upstart German Reich and the European democratic nation states immediately preceding the First World War, during which Einstein conceived of and wrote *Negerplastik*. It would only be confronted incisively by a powerfully critical, parodic and uniquely agonistic version of play with the coming of the dada moment in Zurich in 1916, which also valorized Primitive culture in its chants, masks, and performances while mocking the cult value of primitive ritual as well as the cult value of modern individual contemplation. Still in the late 1930s, early 1940s, Johan Huizinga, in his landmark work *Homo Ludens* (1938/44) was involved with the task of defining various aspects of the culture of play across the times and regions of the globe. Unfortunately, he had less than a spurious, namely a false understanding of Schiller’s transcendentalist notion of *Spieltrieb* (urge to play) as a mere instinct.⁵⁰ Clearly, the aesthetic experience as self-referential immanence in a space of its own was outside of his socio-anthropological focus with its concern for the relations of the socially defined spaces of play as, most basically, anarchist *paidia* and competitive *agon* to the space of ritual. Thus for Huizinga, the phenomenon of play is always already one of signification, even though it precedes culture, with social rituals being grafted on it.⁵¹

Compared with these positions, Einstein stood rigorously firm on the fulfilled presence of an absolute form, moreover, not yet in critical distance to the modernist discourse of form from Charles Baudelaire to Stefan George. However, he had already begun to review the notion of an idealist aesthetic absolute from a transcendental construct to the experience of a “physiology of aesthetics” – culminating in his polar model of a tribal “fixed ecstasy” and a modernist avant-garde “ecstatic training”.⁵²

⁵⁰ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study in the Play-Element of Culture*, London-Boston 1949, 168.

⁵¹ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1-27.

⁵² “André Masson, étude ethnologique”, in: *Documents*, 2, 1929, 93-105.

His position in *Negerplastik* is already one of a physically based "aisthesis", a "*physiology of aesthetics*" as perception and apperception in a Nietzschean sense. Even if not yet altogether developed, his point of view is rather that and thereby directed against the meta-physics of system-philosophical idealist aesthetics. On the basis of such "aisthesis", where vision is tactile, Einstein can later on, in the 1930s, quite specifically also turn against an emptied-out, "merely aesthetic" experience of Primitive art. The "merely aesthetic", after all, erases the corporeal energies of the medium as an intricate part of a symbolic work. Such position against the "merely aesthetic" can be – very cautiously – compared to Aby Warburg's notion of a *Nachleben* (continued life) of the Primitive in the modern. Warburg was concerned with the precarious potential of a continued efficacy of the "culture of the touch" in the midst of an ever accelerating alienation through abstraction that had turned from the symbolic into the mere utilitarian functional. Einstein comes to the same conclusion in his view of traditional art history as a failure: "Due to the hypertrophy of the Western episteme art history was being severed too violently from the complexities of cultural history [...] through a historically insufficient, *merely aesthetic*⁵³ point of view through which history was being reduced to a type of mechanics of forms and styles".⁵⁴ Suffice it to say, that Einstein here in *Negerplastik* (1915) is most conscious of, in fact, openly programmatic about his own aesthetically based views of African art, however complemented by his considerations of the *transvisual* tribal ritual. Yet, after the war, which reinforced his aversion to Western idealism, and through his drive to unmask it and his interest in non-Western art and cultures, he critically revisited the issue of an aesthetic approach in his 1921 *Afrikanische Plastik*. In this work – it focuses on a series of individual objects from a variety of African cultures (Benin, Ifa, Yoruba, Ekoï, Fan) – he now valorized a historical point of view on African sculpture on the basis of contemporary international ethnological research.⁵⁵

Whether the approach is aesthetic or historical, the question remains, however, of whether Einstein could then, or anyone else now can, at all step out of a Western perspective and arrive at an understanding of a non-European seeing embodied in African sculpture, the forms of which so powerfully attracted the historical movements of expressionism, cubism,

⁵³ My emphasis; RR.

⁵⁴ Einstein, *Werke*, Vol. 4, 303.

⁵⁵ Einstein's programmatically aesthetic position in *Negerplastik* dehistoricizes African forms as fixed ritual, while he later in *Afrikanische Plastik* (1921) at least begins to relativize historically, opening – to some extent – a line of thinking about African productions toward James Clifford's views of the dynamics of change inherent in their "hybridity".

and surrealism. They were drawn to these forms as one is attracted to and fascinated by the insight that the primitive which had been culturally repressed as the non-European was related to yet not identical to their own repressions. Can we really ever forgo the premises of our cultural memory, forget our Western perspective in order to see otherwise, namely that which may be *invisible* for such a point of view? Have we, or, for that matter, have Picasso or Georges Braque a century ago thus ever seen African aesthetic productions as the members of the culture they are documents of had seen them? At any rate, the old historicist question of “how it really was” leads us to the recognition that understanding is a matter of interpretation based on certain premises and perspectives.⁵⁶ Thus the historical avant-garde’s interpretations of extra-European cultural productions – with Einstein’s *Negerplastik* as a leading theoretical example – have clearly opened our eyes to the instability of once-presumed solid constructs of a Western identity of self and its art as self-expression and have brought into view our repressed desires to succumb to the lure of “elective affinities”. Such experience has meanwhile become part of an increasingly global experience – in both directions, from the West toward its “other” and vice versa.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Susan Mullin Vogel, *Baule: African Art, Western Eyes*, New Haven 1997, 108.

Surrealism for the Ear: Paul Deharme's Radio-Plays

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Paul Deharme is a pioneer of French avant-garde radio of the late 1920s and 1930s. He was one of the first radio professionals to think about radio as an art form in its own right, able to compete with theater and cinema. He believed that radio could produce a cathartic reaction in its listeners akin to what the surrealists had hoped poetry and painting could accomplish. Two radio-plays authored by Deharme, *Le pont du Hibou* (1928) and *L'île des voix* (1936), whose narratives both take place outside Europe's borders, demonstrate the particular method he used to impress on his listeners the importance of dream states. *Le pont du Hibou* (1928) opens with a male voice addressing the listener:

Installez vous bien dans un fauteuil ... Fermez les yeux, ou mieux, faites l'obscurité dans la salle où vous êtes ...

Efforcez-vous enfin de ne penser à rien.

Faites comme si vous vouliez dormir.

Faites comme si vous vouliez rêver!

--L'aventure que vous allez vivre se passe aux Etats-Unis, pendant la guerre de Sécession qui opposait les Sudistes aux Fédéraux. Le personnage que vous allez incarner est un planteur sudiste.¹

In the recording of the play, the speaker's voice is smooth and casual, as if the speaker were continuing a conversation with the listener that had started before. In this apostrophe, he suggests to the listener to forget everything around him and focus on the play. Like a psychoanalyst, the speaker gives precise directions in order to put the listener into a dreamlike state that will allow him to experience the play in an intensified way – historical and geographical defamiliarization only adding to the effect. For, he/she is now presented with a planter during the US Secession War, whom the Federalist soldiers have found guilty of treason,

¹ Paul Derharme, *Le pont du Hibou*, Paris 1928, typescript Radio-France Archive, Paris, 1.

and who is about to be hanged from the bridge of Hibou. The final seconds of the planter's life and his dream of evasion are described as if it were the listener's own life. Deharme adapted the plot from Ambrose Bierce's short story "An occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge". To bring the story closer to the listener, he used a technique of his invention, so-called silhouettes: the narrator avoids mentioning proper names or places, sets up a generic "here and now" and addresses the listener in the second person in order to make him identify completely with the main character of the play, the planter. The listener imagines together with the planter that once the commando is executed, the rope snaps, he plunges into the water, dives and escapes to reach his family at home. Yet, as the listener comes to realize only at the end, the dream never materializes; in reality the death sentence is executed and the planter dies. The impact of the play was strong indeed. As we can read in his account of the play presented in the book *Pour un art radiophonique* (1930), a flood of letters to Deharme expressed either euphoria or outrage, and Deharme was delighted, a strong identification of his listeners with the plot and a passionate response to it was precisely what he had wanted to achieve.²

Le pont du Hibou was broadcast in 1928 by Radio-Paris, the famous radio-station located on the Eiffel-Tower.³ Even though it is not the first radio-play produced in France, histories of French radio-broadcasting usually refer to *Le pont du Hibou* as the first successful radio-play to be broadcast and to Deharme as a pioneer in the professionalization of French radio-broadcasting known just as much for his radio plays as for his radio advertising company, Phoniric.⁴ Yet, one can sense that there is more to Deharme's method than professionalism. Even though *Le pont du Hibou* relies on contemporary storytelling techniques – stream of consciousness and unity of time and place –, it applies for the first time a method that is specific to radio only, having the speaker manipulate the listener's focus on the play. Perhaps most striking is the way in which the speaker attempts to suggest a dream-state to the listener, out of which he proceeds to wake him up at the end of the play. While Walter Benjamin

² Paul Deharme, *Pour un art radiophonique. Les essais*, Vol. 17, Paris 1930, 46-60. Deharme presents in his book detailed analyses of several replies, comparing them to Freud's writings in order to prove that the mechanism of transference while listening to his radio play is similar to the one that happens in dreams.

³ *Le Pont du Hibou* was broadcast on Radio-Paris on May 8, 1928, and on Radio Juan-les-Pins, on February 26, 1929 (Deharme, *Pour un art radiophonique*, 45). No complete recording of the play is available today.

⁴ See Cécile Méadel, *Histoire de la radio des années trente. Du sans-filiste à l'auditeur*, Paris 1994, 289-312; René Duval, *Histoire de la radio en France*, Paris 1979; and Denis Maréchal, *Radio Luxembourg 1933-1993. Un média au coeur de l'Europe*, Nancy 1994.

and Bertolt Brecht had also attempted to turn the listener into an active participant in didactic radio plays that were often based on dialogues, Deharme's manipulation of the listener's mind with the help of an anonymous voice makes us associate Deharme's radio practice with some of the techniques applied by Sigmund Freud and appropriated by the surrealists in their poetic practice of automatic writing.⁵

Who was Paul Deharme, and what motivated his experimenting in radio broadcasting? Previous attempts to adapt theater plays or fiction for the radio had bored the audience, or attracted its attention only because listeners mistook fiction for reality.⁶ In 1925, Gabriel Germinet's play *Maremoto* evoked the ship wreck of a boat and the emergency calls of the crew in such realistic terms that listeners believed it to be true and sent worried telegrams to news services in order to inform them of the imaginary disaster. Even after more than fifteen years of exposure to regular radio broadcasting, *War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles (1939) famously caused panic among the residents of New Jersey who believed that the science-fiction story of the invasion of their state by extra-terrestrials was real news. In view of the audience's confusion of broadcasting registers, *Le Pont du Hibou*'s elaborate frame was one way of making the audience aware of the fictional character of the play, while attempting to keep it as realistic as possible.

While the success of a radio play was thus indeed measured by the degree to which it was able to maintain suspense yet be at all moments clear about the artistic or real news value of any production, in what follows I will argue that Deharme and his team also attempted to make an argument about surrealism itself. To accomplish this, Deharme worked closely together with what can be called surrealism's dissidents – Robert Desnos, Antonin Artaud, Jacques Prévert – who had taken their distance with a movement they felt was too closely controlled by its founder André Breton. Deharme converged with these dissidents in their conviction that surrealism had to reach out to a larger audience, using high and low brow registers such as the radio or print journalism. The two radio-plays

⁵ Walter Benjamin's radio-plays are collected in *Aufklärung für Kinder. Rundfunkvorträge*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main 1985. They were originally broadcast during 1929-1932. Bertolt Brecht's early radio plays have also been published in: *Frühe Hörspiele*, Berlin 1982. About the evolution of radio as an avant-garde art in its different national manifestations see Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (eds.), *Wireless Imagination. Sound, Radio, and the Avant-garde*, Cambridge, Mass.-London 1992.

⁶ Christopher Todd gives an extensive list of earlier French radio-plays in his "Gabriel Germinet and the 'Livre d'or du théâtre radiophonique français' (1923-1935)", in: *Modern and Contemporary France*, 10, 2002, 225-41.

produced by Deharme that we have still today, *Le pont du Hibou* and *L'île des voix*, therefore deserve to be reread for several reasons. They are among the earliest successful radio plays in France that exist in manuscript form and as recordings. They are also part of the artistic output from the margins of the French surrealist movement. Furthermore, they applied and put into practice principles used not only in surrealism but also in psychoanalysis – Sigmund Freud's distinction between manifest and latent dream content – and in theater – Antonin Artaud's idea of the incantatory voice explained in his essay on the theater of cruelty. In short, Deharme's radio-plays can be seen as a part of the ramifications of French surrealism between the wars.⁷

André Breton was known for his appreciation of painting as well as for his pronounced disdain of music. He made known his thoughts on the futility of music in a text published in English by Paul Nougé under the programmatic title *Music is dangerous. Silence is golden*. But even as early as 1928, Breton wrote in his essay "Le surréalisme et la peinture" that while painting and the visual sense stimulated the "navigation of the spirit", music and sound were not rigorous or clear enough to be worth closer examination.⁸ Breton did also not appreciate the poet's engagement with the masses. For him, surrealism as an avant-garde movement had to take seriously its separation from the rest of a society which Breton considered unfit for the experimental productions of his group. One of Breton's closest collaborators, the poet Robert Desnos, fell out with Breton over – among other things – the latter's accusation in the second manifesto of surrealism that he wrote articles for popular journals and magazines.⁹ Desnos and his recently arrived Cuban friend, Alejo Carpentier, would soon begin to work for Deharme's radio advertising agency. For the next seven years, radio broadcasting would turn into a full-time occupation for them, and it would bring to an almost complete halt their prior literary activities and ambitions. They would also collaborate in projects with other French writers who had distanced themselves from Breton, such as Antonin Artaud and Jacques Prévert. While radio broadcasting was not

⁷ The relative neglect of French radio before 1939 is partly due to the difficulty of recovering radio programs from the period between the wars and of gaining access to publications on radio that have been out of print for many years. As Guy Robert argues, Pierre Schaeffer's radio workshop Studio d'Essais (1942-44), later Club d'Essai (1946-1954), also took attention away from experimental radio productions before the Second World War (Guy Robert, "Paul Deharme (1898-1934)", in: *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Radiodiffusion*, 2004, 180-9).

⁸ André Breton, *Le surréalisme et la peinture. Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée 1928-1965*, Paris 1965, 11-12.

⁹ See Breton's statement about Desnos in his "Second Manifeste" (1930), in: *Manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris 1996, 60-145, here 115.

worth a single mention in Breton's writings, for Desnos and his friends it offered everything that the writing of poetry did not: an immediate reception by a mass audience, and the sensory element of a voice that added expressiveness to the poetic message, making it more powerful and suggestive than written poetry. For some, as Denis Hollier has written, radio in the 1930s even announced the "death of paper" and the shift from a book-reading culture to an audio-visual one.¹⁰ The emphasis on the mysterious power of the voice, invested with tonality and affect in a way for which writing could never compensate, can be seen not only in *Le pont du Hibou*, but in the protagonism of the voice of a magician in Deharme's second play, *L'île des voix* (1936), as well as in the radio-play analyzed by Hollier, which was dedicated to Paul Deharme, *La cité des voix* (1938) by Pierre Descaves.¹¹

As Deharme explained in his book-length essay, *Pour un art radiophonique* (1930), radio broadcasting, because of its exclusive reliance on the sound and not on images, offered a unique potential and challenge, not only for journalists and advertising specialists, but for artists.¹² Deharme proposed that instead of merely imitating older art forms, radio broadcasters could create a "mental theater", using the suggestive power of the anonymous voice of the speaker to provoke a domestic catharsis in the audience.¹³ With this argument, Deharme alluded to an older argument made by Pierre Cusy and Gabriel Germinet in their book *Théâtre radiophonique. Mode nouveau d'expression artistique* (1926). Cusy and Germinet had been the first to propose to establish radio as a reputable art in its own right, but their strategy was to argue for the similarity of radio with theater, claiming that radio's only difference lay in the absence of vision. For Deharme, in contrast, the lack of vision in radio offered enhanced possibilities of moving the listener, since it not only provoked an emotional reaction, like a theater play, but also forced the listener to become active and create images of his/her own if he/she wanted to understand what was said. Radio, according to Deharme, provoked an abundance of impressions that required a more active participation of the audience than theater did. But its evocative richness had to be constantly

¹⁰ Denis Hollier, "The Death of Paper: A Radio Play", in: *October*, 78, 1996, 3-20.

¹¹ Pierre Descaves, *La cité des voix. Création radiophonique en un prologue et 4 périodes verbales*, Paris 1938.

¹² I have analyzed Deharme's theory in greater detail in "From Surrealism to Popular Art: Paul Deharme's Radio Theory", *Modernism/Modernity*, 2, 2009, 357-74.

¹³ See Marie-Claire Dumas in Robert Desnos, *Œuvres*, Paris 1999, 736-7; 776-7.

stimulated and channeled into a productive mental experience; otherwise the listener would lose interest.¹⁴

Deharme's ideas about radio can be compared to Antonin Artaud's theater of cruelty in that both writers emphasize the importance of pitch, tone and gesture for the impact made by the spoken word on the audience. Artaud had participated as a speaker in *La grande complainte de Fantômas* (1932), the radio play created by Desnos and Carpentier to advertise a new sequel to the famous crime fiction novels by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre. In this play, Desnos and Carpentier had paid heed to Deharme's method of having a speaker address the listener and guide him smoothly from his present environment to the story of *Fantômas*, orchestrated by a choir and a few lead characters who were speaking in rhymed verses. In their theoretical writing, both Artaud and Deharme emphasized that they wanted to bring art to the people and turn it into an interactive exchange between the artist and his audience. Deharme called the listening experience a "rêve dirigé"; he wanted his listener to immerse himself/herself into a given play as if he/she were having a dream. Similarly, Artaud – in his theory of theater – called for the translation of thought images to dreams:

De même que nos rêves agissent sur nous et que la réalité agit sur nos rêves, nous pensons qu'on peut identifier les images de la pensée à un rêve, qui sera efficace dans la mesure où il sera jeté avec la violence qu'il faut. Et le public croira aux rêves du théâtre à condition qu'il les prenne vraiment pour des rêves et non pour un calque de la réalité.¹⁵

Both writers, that is, thought that dreams act as catalyzers for the experience of the non-real offered in the theater or in the radio. Dreams, as well as fiction could have a therapeutic effect on the individual and collective subconscious, liberating it from repressed fears and anxieties. That the narratives of Deharme's own two radio-plays are set outside of Europe, was perhaps not all that accidental here, as these "exotic" *locales* only added to that effect of liberation. Furthermore, the non-linguistic attributes of the voice particularly facilitated the transference between individual psyche and fiction. For Artaud, actors had to focus again on the

¹⁴ "L'art radiophonique est et restera proprement le domaine des images éveillés par les mots [...], sa technique doit être de rendre ces images vivantes, de les maîtriser, de les manier". (Deharme, *Pour un art radiophonique*, 38).

¹⁵ Antonin Artaud, "Le théâtre et son double", in: *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. IV, Paris 1964, 11-175, here 103.

incantatory power of their voice and recover the expressiveness of gesture and mimic. In this, he let himself inspire by oriental theater traditions:

Avec un sens tout oriental de l'expression ce langage objectif et concret du théâtre sert à coincer, à enserrer des organes. Il court dans la sensibilité. Abandonnant les utilisations occidentales de la parole, il fait des mots des incantations [...]. Il dégage le sens d'un lyrisme nouveau du geste, qui, par sa précipitation ou son amplitude dans l'air, finit par dépasser le lyrisme des mots.¹⁶

The language of Artaud's new theater is "objective and concrete" because it evokes sensations and is not bound to the conventions of clarity and beauty of discourse so dominant in French rhetoric until then. For Artaud, one has to let go of words and find lyricism in gesture and mimic. This program for a theater of cruelty has close affinities also with German radio theorist Rudolph Arnheim. Arnheim was convinced that radio broadcasting offered a return to the lyrical voice in its Romantic inception. In *Radio* (1936), he writes:

Novalis says: 'Our speech was at first far more musical, but it has gradually become prosaic and lost its note; it is now a noise or a 'loudness'; it must become song again.' This does not mean the art-song; Novalis is referring to the dreadful rupture between art and everyday usage which has been brought about by our civilization. Beauty is offered us in the concert-hall, in the realm of the 'non-functional'. But where sound is functional as a means of communication, in everyday speech it is impoverished, blunted, without beauty.¹⁷

While Artaud's theater of the cruel never wanted to be anything else but an avant-garde practice by the sheer extremism and difficulty of his plays, in radio broadcasting this Romanticism of the word turned music seems more problematic. Arnheim's utopian tone is striking, especially since his book was translated and published when the author was already exiled in England. Radio broadcasting was being put to use indeed, in Germany, England, the Soviet Union and other countries, but not only for the sake of art and education but that of politics as well. The fascination of Arnheim as well as Deharme with the aura of the radio voice seems singularly disconnected from its contemporary use as a propaganda instrument.

Deharme's radiophonic mental theater, though, should not simply be read as the attempt of an *ingénu* to test out a new form of mass communication without considering its possible political implications. The

¹⁶ Artaud, "Le théâtre et son double", 108.

¹⁷ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio*, tr. Margaret Ludwig Read and Herbert Read, London 1936, 31.

deliberate exoticism of the settings of his two surviving radio plays can be read, on the contrary, as intended to caution the audience against listening in a non-critical way to the air-waves. Deharme insists on the fictional character of his transmissions and admonishes his listeners not to take for granted what they hear. This we can see even more so in Deharme's second play, *L'île des voix*, a fairy-tale inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Treasure Island*.¹⁸

The play is set on an island in Polynesia. In the opening passage, the listener, in a now familiar ploy, is made protagonist: "Au cours d'un voyage dans l'Océan Pacifique... après escalade en Polynésie... aux Iles Marquises... à Hawaï..., à Samoa..., à Tahiti..., un naufrage vous a jeté, seul et blessé, vous avez longtemps crié et vous vous êtes évanoui". The listener thus abruptly finds himself literally awakening as a shipwreck in a new world. As *L'île des voix* unfolds there appears a female helper, Lehua, the beautiful daughter of Kalamake, the chief sorcerer of the island. She warns the shipwreck of her dangerous father who then promptly makes his appearance. The sorcerer takes him to another deserted island where he has to help him to counterfeit dollars. Kalamake then decides to kill the shipwreck. He grows to gigantic proportions and is about to leave him behind on the island. The protagonist, however, is able to take advantage of the flying carpet that Kalamake has left unattended; he overcomes Kalamake and leaves him, despoiled of his magic powers, to die on the desert island.

This island is an "island of voices" for the listener, who has only the female voice of Lehua and that of the villain Kalamake as well as two choirs to orient himself. The exotic surrounding is suggested by music from afar and by voices that speak in verses. Distances and proportions grow and shrink miraculously, but we do not hear anything about the looks of either of the protagonists or the island, everything is left to the imagination of the listener. Yet, this scenario comes with a morale that is, as with Sheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*, about response and action in the face of unlikely circumstances. Just before the protagonist finds the flying carpet, a choir of male voices tells us:

Il faut faire abandon de tout esprit critique
Admettre la magie maîtrisant la matière
Et sans chercher à en pénétrer le mystère
Se servir hardiment de moyens identiques
A ceux que le sorcier emploie ouvertement.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Institut National de l'Audiovisuel in Paris holds a complete recording of *L'île des voix* from June 19, 1936.

¹⁹ Paul Deharme, *L'île des voix*, Paris 1934, typescript Radio-France Archive, 29.

And this is what the protagonist/the listener does: he accepts his strange plight and acts as best he can. The non-European setting reinforces the impression that we are dealing with an archaic, anti-modern world that has to be dealt with on its own terms. To convey this morale, the classical rhymed meter – a mixture of alexandrines and octosyllables – underscore the fictional character of the play and add musicality. The verse form and the comments by the two choirs, one male the other female, also function as mnemonic devices and help to structure the narrative.

As *Le pont du Hibou*, *L'île des voix* is a didactic tale, meant to entertain its listeners, yet also to teach them about the proper use of fictions in general. The fairy-tale or fable are indeed the genres that most closely fit the radio aesthetic created by Deharme. His response to the lack, in broadcasting, of a means to distinguish between the real and the fictional is to create parables that are framed by apostrophes to the listeners, guiding them along in the process of interpretation.

In his preference for non-European and fantastic settings over everyday “realistic” ones Deharme was certainly not alone. In his book *Radio Mystères. Le théâtre radiophonique policier, fantastique et de science-fiction*, Jacques Baudou writes that crime fiction and fantastic narratives were dominant genres in French radio from early on, the Fantômas series being only one of many publishing successes in the 1930s.²⁰ But as we have seen, there was more than just a business man's calculus behind his use of the fantastic genre. Deharme believed that by evoking in a controlled way fear in his listener, he could not only act upon the “collective soul” of his listeners but also educate them to produce informed responses in their own lives when confronted with unexpected situations. Not everybody, however, understood his new “radiophonic art” well.

It was René Sudre, a journalist, who criticized what he called Deharme's “illusionism” in an article titled “La radio et le rêve” (1930). For Sudre, Deharme was fundamentally mistaken in assuming that the complete identification of a listener with a fictional protagonist was a good thing:

En nous demandant de substituer une personnalité étrangère à notre personnalité propre par voie de suggestion, il nous livrait aux assujettissements de l'hypnotisme. Il supposait une sensibilité nerveuse que la psychiatrie moderne considère comme morbide. Enfin il se fondait sur une fausse conception de l'art qui est

²⁰ Jacques Baudou, *Radio Mystères. Le théâtre radiophonique policier, fantastique et de science-fiction*, Amiens 1997.

essentiellement un spectacle, c'est-a-dire une action que nous regardons (*spectacle*) mais dans laquelle nous n'entrons pas.²¹

For Sudre, art, including radio art, had to remain associated with “French” analytical reason – “le bon sens et la raison française”²² –, not with emotion.

Pierre Descaves replied to Sudre’s attack in an article titled “Art populaire” and argued that Sudre had judged Deharme on moral and psychiatric grounds but had neglected the social dimension of his aesthetics: “Ce que proposait M. Paul Deharme d’un trait souvent très juste, c’est une sorte d’état d’âme collectif qui, lui du moins, sera acquis insensiblement, par l’ensemble des auditeurs et avec d’autant plus de sûreté qu’il sera moins voulu et surtout moins imposé”.²³ According to Descaves, Deharme’s way of educating his audience was a subtle one, by way of slowly leading the listeners toward a sense of collective being that was far removed from pathological states of mind suggested by Sudre.

The underlying question was, of course, that of the access and manipulation of a mass audience through radio broadcasting. Was the radio able to reveal and bring out deeper collective motions, and positively influence national awareness and cohesion, or was it merely manipulating its audience in a dangerous way? This discussion of Deharme’s work shows how much radio broadcasting’s effect on its audience’s psyche was a source of concern for everyone. In the 1930s, the radio set still retained some of its mesmerizing power – or at least, so it was believed by many critics –, as the anonymous voices transmitted over the air had before been associated only with the voices heard by mystics or esoteric mediums. Deharme believed that in making his audience aware of the difference between reality and fiction, and by controlling its identification with an anonymous voice through a specific narrative frame, he would be able to turn radio into a therapeutic mass medium.

We can argue indeed, taking Descaves’ analysis one step further, that Deharme’s plays associate radio with fantasy and mystery, because these genres best address and question the listener’s identification of the anonymous speaker’s voice with authority. In emphasizing the dream quality of his plays, Deharme pointed to the profound ambiguity of a radio voice which could alternatively be associated with that of a magician, a hypnotist or a psychoanalyst. The ghostlike quality of the radio voice

²¹ René Sudre, “La radio et le rêve”, in: *Le huitième art: mission de la radio*, Paris 1945, 132-5, here 134.

²² Sudre, “La radio et le rêve”, 135.

²³ Pierre Descaves, “Art populaire”, in: *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, January 10, 1931, 9.

retained in his plays its uncanny, fantastic power and was part of what he hoped to educate his audience about: to be aware of the distance that separated those voices from their own lives and draw their own conclusions, that is, to remain involved as active listeners with what they heard through the radio.

While being successful with his listeners at the time, however, Deharme's argument about the specificity of the radio experience was not understood. His intended interlocutors were the surrealists who would not listen to his plays and did not participate in the controversy on radio as an art form. Yet, in crucial ways these dissident surrealist narratives address concerns that would become central later on in artists' reflections about their relation to the mass media. The idea of the collective subconscious and art's therapeutic acting upon it highlights the constructive efforts of some to build a new relationship with a mass audience that only then, thanks to new technologies such as the radio or television, was constituted as such. For Deharme, radio art had to stand up to its unique potential, and in this way, the medium had to become the message. Again, the spatial divide Deharme's radio-works introduced to that effect between the listener in France and the narrative's non-European setting seems anything but accidental here.

Amauta, l'Europe et les avant-gardes

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La revue *Amauta*, dirigée par José Carlos Mariátegui à Lima entre 1926 et 1930, est la revue majeure des avant-gardes péruviennes, et parmi les plus importantes d'Amérique du Sud dans cette décennie qui en compte beaucoup. Revue de « *Doctrina-Arte-Literatura-Polémica* », elle propose dans chaque numéro, largement illustré, des articles de politique nationale et internationale (américaine et européenne), des analyses sociales, économiques, ethnologiques, des œuvres et des analyses ou débats littéraires. À travers elle, je voudrais questionner la réception des avant-gardes européennes par l'Amérique du Sud, le Pérou paraissant un terrain d'étude pertinent, dans la mesure où l'articulation entre le « rite de passage européen¹ » et la revendication d'une culture indigène y est particulièrement lisible.

La question des rapports à l'Europe, puissance coloniale et creuset de la recherche artistique, à la fois modèle et école, est récurrente dans *Amauta*². En fonction de quels critères un pays colonisé peut-il se (re)constituer une culture propre ? La réponse est d'autant plus difficile à élaborer que la plupart des artistes et intellectuels de l'époque font le voyage d'Europe, comme en d'autres temps on a fait son voyage en Italie. Or, dans les mêmes années, le débat central dans toute l'Amérique du Sud (et dans les Amériques en général) porte sur les conditions d'une culture

¹ Cette intervention, ici fortement remaniée, trouvait son origine dans un *panel* présenté sous ce titre par Barbara Meazzi, Régis Salado et moi-même au colloque *Europa ! Europa ?* (mai 2008, Université de Gand). Le *panel* se proposait de réfléchir, d'une part, sur le propre d'un regard américain sur l'Europe dans le contexte des avant-gardes historiques, d'autre part, sur le rôle de ce passage par l'Europe dans la constitution d'une voix américaine fusionnant modèles européens et références locales.

² Voir en particulier les n^{os} 17 et 18 de septembre et octobre 1928, dont l'article d'Antenor Orrego, « ¿Cuál es la cultura que creará América? » et la polémique entre le Bolivien Franz Tamayo et Martí Casanovas. (Franz Tamayo, « Autoctonismo y europeismo », in: *Amauta*, 17, setiembre de 1928, 86-91; Martí Casanovas, « Autoctonismo y europeismo », Réplica [à Franz Tamayo], in: *Amauta*, 18, octubre de 1928, 77-83.) C'est aussi un sujet qui préoccupe José Carlos Mariátegui (désormais : J.C.M.) : voir « ¿Existe un pensamiento hispano-americano? » (in: *Mundial*, 1^{er} mai 1925) et *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (désormais : *Siete ensayos*), Lima 1928.

nationale. Le problème est accentué par la nature d'un des modèles européens contemporains : les avant-gardes historiques mettant en avant une démarche de rupture, comment ne pas être tenté d'y reconnaître des parallèles ? Comment rénover/innover alors que la référence à laquelle on souhaite échapper se construit sur une dynamique analogue – qui est celle même de l'avant-garde ?

Amauta rend compte d'une grande partie des positions possibles, y compris de manière apparemment contradictoire. Son liminaire programatique se donne d'emblée une visée internationale : « Esta revista vinculará a los hombres nuevos del Perú, primero con los de los otros pueblos de América, en seguida con los de los otros pueblos del mundo³ ». *Amauta* a donc pour vocation de développer les échanges, à tout le moins de faciliter la réception. Mais la portée que Mariátegui lui accorde est significative : d'un côté, un espace américain unique (unifié ?), dont témoigne la présence récurrente d'auteurs du subcontinent⁴ ; de l'autre, le monde, qui inclut l'Europe sans la mettre en exergue. Cet effacement va dans le sens de l'effort qu'exigeait Mariátegui en 1927 par rapport à l'Espagne : « Sólo al precio de la ruptura con la Metrópoli, nuestra America ha empezado de descubrir su personalidad y a crear su destino⁵ ».

Pourtant le même homme qui, comme beaucoup de ses contemporains, a fait son « apprentissage⁶ » en Europe, n'hésite pas ailleurs à affirmer que celle-ci est nécessaire aux Américains : « creo que no hay salvación para Indo-América sin la ciencia y el pensamiento europeos u occidentales⁷ ». La complexité d'une relation aussi contradictoire suppose des études d'envergure (elles existent, et on en trouvera les références dans les notes), mais le contexte de ce congrès invitait à creuser la question de la réception des avant-gardes européennes. Je me propose donc de préci-

³ « Cette revue mettra en contact les hommes nouveaux du Pérou, d'abord avec les autres peuples d'Amérique, mais aussi avec les autres peuples du monde ». J.C.M., « Presentación de "Amauta" », in : *A.*, 1, août 1926, cité dans *Ideología y política*, Lima 1969, 239.

⁴ Les écrivains nord-américains sont en revanche relativement absents (Waldo Franck est mentionné) et Franz Tamayo, comme Martí Casanovas, tout en reconnaissant en Walt Whitman le premier auteur américain sans influence européenne, le jugent (contrairement à Mariátegui) inadéquat pour le Sud (*A.*, 17, septembre 1928, 89 ; et 18, octobre 1928, 79).

⁵ « C'est seulement au prix de la rupture avec la Métropole que notre Amérique a commencé de découvrir sa personnalité et à créer son destin ». Dans : J.C.M., « La Batalla de "Martín Fierro" », in : *Variaciones*, septembre 1927, repris dans *Temas de nuestra América*, Lima 1960, rééd. 1986, 117.

⁶ J.C.M., « Advertencia », in : *Siete ensayos*, rééd. 1995, 12. Il séjourne en Europe entre 1920 et 1923.

⁷ « je pense qu'il n'y a pas aujourd'hui de salut pour les Indoaméricains sans la science et la pensée européennes et occidentales ». J.C.M., « Advertencia », 12.

ser la connaissance que la revue transmet de l'Europe, puis les relations qu'entretient avec elle l'avant-garde péruvienne, et la place qu'y tient la démarche « indigéniste », pour comprendre en quoi celle-ci pense se constituer comme alternative à l'Europe avant-gardiste.

L'Europe d'*Amauta* : une réception politique des avant-gardes

Le regard que Mariátegui porte sur l'Europe est avant tout un regard politique⁸. Passionné par la question de la démocratie et des origines du fascisme⁹, il est convaincu que le vieux continent est en crise, voire en dégénérescence. C'est l'occasion d'inverser le rapport politique qui unit les deux continents : si le combat pour l'indépendance des pays d'Amérique du Sud s'est fait dans le cadre de l'Europe, avec les mots de celle-ci et son répertoire d'idées, l'Amérique indienne a à son tour un rôle à jouer dans la mise en place d'un nouvel « ordre mondial » socialiste, car la civilisation inca peut être considérée comme la plus avancée des sociétés communistes primitives¹⁰. L'Amérique peut apporter un nouveau souffle, voire constituer un nouveau modèle, mais doit de son côté, pour y parvenir, s'unir et prendre ses distances avec l'Europe.

Le modèle esthétique suit-il un même processus de retournement ? En ce qui concerne les arts et la littérature, la revue propose des documents de tout type : des traductions d'auteurs européens (essentiellement français, espagnols, allemands et russes), des comptes rendus ou des études, la participation à des enquêtes internationales (sur la littérature prolétarienne, sur le futurisme). Dans ce domaine, Mariátegui semble, surtout, partager la conviction de Franz Tamayo que, pour ce qui concerne les arts, l'Amérique est « fatalement » occidentale¹¹. Il ne faut cependant pas se méprendre sur le sens qu'il donne à ce dernier terme : « occidental » s'oppose ici à

⁸ Il est en cela très proche de la revue argentine *Claridad* (1926-1941), elle aussi engagée dans la diffusion du communisme et de l'expérience soviétique, et dont le titre est une référence explicite au journal *Clarté* d'Henri Barbusse.

⁹ Voir par exemple les essais qui constituent *La Escena contemporánea* en 1925. Seul le chapitre cinq (« La Revolución y la inteligencia ») s'occupe des écrivains : il y présente H. Barbusse, A. France, Gorki, A. Blok, G. Grosz et F.T. Marinetti.

¹⁰ Sur ce point, voir en particulier le texte écrit pour le deuxième anniversaire de la revue (A., 17, septembre 1928, 248-9).

¹¹ « fatalmente occidentales », Franz Tamayo, « Auctoconismo y europeismo », 87. Il affirme lui aussi que « hors du monde occidental, il n'y a pas de salut » pour le Pérou « fuera del mundo occidental, no hay salvación para nosotros » (86), mais qu'il faut dans ce cadre préserver une intégrité.

la fois à l'Espagne colonisatrice et aux États-Unis, perçus comme les nouveaux colonisateurs.

C'est dans ce contexte que Mariátegui conçoit l'avant-garde : l'article liminaire annonce vouloir étudier « tous les grands mouvements politiques, philosophiques, artistiques, littéraires, scientifiques de rénovation¹² » et, lors du premier anniversaire de la revue, Mariátegui réaffirme le commun caractère révolutionnaire de la nouvelle génération, du nouvel esprit, de la nouvelle sensibilité, de l'avant-garde et du socialisme¹³. On ne s'étonnera donc pas de trouver, à côté des auteurs européens réputés d'avant-garde (F.T. Marinetti, André Breton, Herwarth Walden, Pedro Garfias, etc.), des figures importantes de la gauche : un texte de Panait Istrati dans les n° 1 à 3 ou de Boris Pilniak dans le n° 3 (novembre 1926), d'Ernst Toller dans le n° 20 (janvier 1929), des études sur Bernard Shaw et le socialisme, sur Romain Rolland dans le n° 2 (octobre 1926), sur Henri Barbusse dans le n° 16 (juillet 1928). À côté d'eux, des études politiques de Luc Durtain, d'Aragon, des études littéraires d'Ilya Ehrenburg et d'Anatolio Lunatcharsky. Ces choix, relativement éclectiques, mais résolument contemporains, montrent que la dimension politique prime sur les orientations esthétiques (effet accentué par la présence de nombreuses analyses sur la situation politique, qui rendent essentiellement compte de l'avancée respective de la révolution communiste et des fascismes). Mais loin d'opposer littérature d'avant-garde (dont la caractéristique, assez vague, il faut le reconnaître, serait la liberté créatrice) et littérature engagée, il s'agit de démontrer que l'avant-garde n'a de raison d'être que politique¹⁴ : sa fonction essentielle est de détruire « l'art bourgeois », faute de quoi elle ne serait qu'une « aventure inutile¹⁵ ». Les intellectuels

¹² « Estudiaremos todos los grandes movimientos de renovación - políticos, filosóficos, artísticos, literarios, científicos ». J.C.M., « Presentación de "Amauta" », 238-9.

¹³ Voir Ferrari, Américo, « La revista *Amauta* y las vanguardias poéticas peruanas », in: *Amauta y su época*, Lima 1998, 322-30. Il note l'ambiguïté des termes *vanguardia*, *vanguardismo*, *nuevo* et *revolucionario*, appliqués indifféremment aux mouvements artistiques et politiques de gauche (322).

¹⁴ Outre César Vallejo (cf. *infra*), plusieurs articles d'Esteban Pavletich critiquent l'application du terme même d'« avant-garde » à un art qu'il considère comme le produit de l'idéologie bourgeoise européenne (voir par exemple « ¿Oportunismo, Desorientación o Reaccionismo estéticos? », in : *A.*, 7, mars 1927, 29-30). Sur le lien entre avant-garde et politique, voir en particulier Luis Monguió, *La poesía postmodernista peruana*, Berkeley 1954.

¹⁵ J.C.M., « Olivier Girondo », in : *Variedades*, 15 août 1925, repris dans *Temas de nuestra América*, 106-9. « Ce sont les moyens qui les préoccupent, pas le but » (Les preocupa el instrumento ; no les preocupa el fin), dit-il dans *La Escena contemporánea* (Lima 1976[1925], 185). Son exemple privilégié est George Grosz. Voir aussi « Arte, revolución y decadencia », in : *A.*, 3, novembre 1926, 3-4, ainsi que le débat autour du concept d'art « pur », considéré comme le signe du refus du politique : dans le n° 13 de mars 1928, par exemple,

péruviens proposent donc une lecture politique de l'ensemble des avant-gardes européennes, identifiant la multiplication des « ismes » à la manifestation de la crise politique et sociale que traverse l'Europe. Pour Mariátegui, les avant-gardes sont finalement à considérer comme une transition, et peut-être même comme une décadence :

La decadencia de la civilización capitalista se refleja en la atomización, en la disolución de su arte [...] En esta crisis se elaboran dispersamente los elementos del arte del porvenir. El cubismo, el dadaísmo, el expresionismo, etc. al mismo tiempo que acusan una crisis, anuncian una reconstrucción.¹⁶

Son accusation est double : d'une part, il considère que « l'esprit nouveau » ne produit plus rien de neuf, et qu'il est même dans une logique d'imitation qui le maintient dans un rapport de dépendance envers l'Europe ; d'autre part, il exige un repositionnement politique des avant-gardes vers la critique du capitalisme.

C'est à travers ce filtre politique que deux modèles sont principalement évoqués. Le futurisme italien, d'abord, sur lequel Mariátegui s'était exprimé dès 1925 dans *La escena contemporánea*. Son analyse est politique et sans ambiguïté : le futurisme est un mouvement esthétique, politique et national qui, en choisissant le fascisme, passe de la rupture à la réaction. Le rédacteur en chef d'*Amauta* n'en offre pas moins à Marinetti la possibilité de présenter son mouvement dans ses pages (n° 10), sans que cela fasse l'objet d'un débat majeur, contrairement à d'autres pays, comme l'Argentine. L'adhésion explicite au futurisme esthétique est du reste le fait de plusieurs artistes, et Xavier Abril le présente, avec le cubisme, comme le point de départ de la « culture nouvelle¹⁷ », conviction que partage Magda Portal, qui considère les « ismos » européens comme une « une première voix d'alerte » et explique que « l'art nouveau a sans aucun doute poussé son premier vagissement dans la cabine d'un aéroplane et dans les

alors que Martí Casanovas dénonce cette orientation (dans « La inmoralidad de la inteligencia pura », in: *A.*, 13, marzo de 1928, 25-6, ici 25), Mariátegui nuance en revanche sa propre analyse en soulignant que cette attitude n'en a pas moins une valeur révolutionnaire, puisque qu'elle marque la faillite de l'esprit bourgeois (« Defensa del disparate puro », in: *A.*, 13, marzo de 1928).

¹⁶ « La décadence de la civilisation capitaliste se reflète dans l'atomisation, dans la dissolution de son art. [...] Dans cette crise, les éléments de l'art futur s'élaborent de manière dispersée. Le cubisme, le dadaïsme, l'expressionnisme, etc. accusent une crise en même temps qu'ils annoncent une reconstruction ». J.C.M., « Arte, revolución y decadencia », 3.

¹⁷ « cultura nueva », Abril, Xavier, « Estetica del sentido en la critica nueva », in: *A.*, 24, juin 1929, 49-52, ici 51. L'article est une étude sur le surréalisme.

ondes concentriques de la radio¹⁸ ». L'empreinte paraît profonde, puisqu'on en trouve des échos chez Mariátegui lui-même, qui se présente, dans le liminaire de sa revue, comme « force belligérante, polémique¹⁹ », empruntant évidemment au moins les images et le lexique du futurisme italien.

Mais le vrai débat porte sur le surréalisme (ce qui, vu les dates de la revue, montre qu'elle est très en phase avec l'actualité culturelle européenne). Présenté parfois comme la synthèse et le dépassement des tendances d'avant-garde qui le précèdent²⁰, il apparaît d'autres fois comme ce qui « a préparé une étape réaliste en littérature²¹ », approche qui semble laisser de côté la part la plus expérimentale du mouvement, mais lui reconnaît une valeur politique, ce que lui dénie au contraire César Vallejo : dans une assez violente diatribe, il réduit le mouvement à des « jeux de salon²² » bourgeois, donc non révolutionnaires. Ce positionnement – tardif – de Vallejo reflète aussi l'évolution d'*Amauta* et de sa définition de l'avant-garde. Car la notion, rarement, ou du moins très partiellement théorisée par la revue, n'y manque pas d'ambiguïté.

Ambiguïtés des avant-gardes péruviennes

En effet, si le choix des œuvres étrangères montre qu'*Amauta* associe de plus en plus explicitement avant-gardes artistiques et engagement politique, Mariátegui a assigné d'emblée pour objectif à sa revue, dont le premier titre prévu était d'ailleurs *Vanguardia*, d'offrir un espace d'expérimentation à la nouvelle génération qui porte l'esprit nouveau au Pérou²³. C'est donc en fait l'éventail des œuvres péruviennes présentées qui illustre

¹⁸ « la primera voz de alerta », « El arte nuevo tuvo su primer vagido seguramente en la cabina de un aeroplano o en las ondas concéntricas del radio ». Dans: Magda Portal, « Andiamos de vida », in: *A.*, 5, janvier 1927, 12.

¹⁹ « Nos sentimos una fuerza beligerante, polémica », J.C.M., « Presentación de "Amauta" », 238.

²⁰ Voir Abril, Xavier, « Estetica del sentido en la critica nueva », 49-52. Abril signe par ailleurs l'un des deux textes dits « surréaliste » que présente la revue.

²¹ « haber preparado una etapa realista en la literatura ». C'est ce que dit Mariátegui à propos de *Nadja* d'André Breton, car il considère que « le surréel » invite à la « récréation du réel » (cité par Julio Jesús Galindo Ormeño, « José Carlos Mariátegui como Crítico literario », in *Amauta y su época*, 295).

²² « Juegos de salón », César Vallejo, « Autopsia del superrealismo », in : *A.*, 30, avril-mai 1930, 45 (texte écrit à Paris).

²³ *Amauta* n'ignore pas pour autant les modernistes ou leurs successeurs : on y lit aussi José María Eguren, Alcides Spelucín ou Alberto Guillén.

la variété des « ismes » européens, preuve que les auteurs en avaient une connaissance fine. Sont publiés dans *Amauta* les précurseurs des avant-gardes latino-américaines, Alberto Hidalgo²⁴ et César Vallejo²⁵ ; Juan Parra del Riego, très influencé par le futurisme italien ; Oquendo de Amat, dont la technique évoque la poésie cubiste ; Xavier Abril et César Moro, proches du surréalisme ; Alejandro Peralta, chef de fil du mouvement indigéniste ; Magda Portal ou César Alfredo Miró Quesada, qui représentent la veine réaliste engagée, etc. : c'est, dès les deux premiers numéros de la revue, toute la jeune poésie péruvienne, pour une grande partie expérimentale, et qui se pense comme une avant-garde. L'approche politique que nous venons de voir est complétée par des analyses esthétiques, même si elles restent elles aussi souvent évasives : Jorge Basadre considère par exemple l'avant-garde comme le refus de la reproduction simple de la vie, et le dépassement de la vie par l'art²⁶ ; Antenor Orrego défend de son côté la recherche typographique de Nicanor de la Fuente comme avant-gardiste, parce qu'elle fait voir « le geste de la parole²⁷ ».

Mais la question entêtante consiste à apprécier s'il s'agit d'une démarche originale ou d'une imitation de l'Europe (ce qui mettrait implicitement en cause le caractère avant-gardiste de la recherche). Sans aucun doute, les parallèles thématiques avec les avant-gardes européennes (la grande ville, les appareils de communication et la vitesse, les groupes humains) sont patents, moins déplacés pourtant qu'on ne pourrait le croire depuis l'Europe, dans un pays qui effectivement se modernise et s'industrialise depuis la fin du XIX^e siècle. Le sentiment d'un décalque tient plutôt aux procédés. Le style séquencé, accéléré des futuristes envahit la poésie : César A. Rodríguez apprécie par exemple chez José Varallanos un style impétueux, décousu, frénétique, qui privilégie les substantifs et rejette les adjectifs (ce qu'il appelle une « poésie de cris²⁸ », qu'il oppose à une poésie « décadente »). Tous travaillent la langue dans le sens de la concision, de la déconstruction, du renouvellement lexical (tant par le néologisme que par le recours à un lexique quotidien ou à des associations inattendues) et cherchent à effacer le sujet lyrique (Miguel Ángel Huamán

²⁴ *Panoplia lírica* date de 1917 et *Química del Espíritu* de 1923.

²⁵ *Trilce* date de 1922.

²⁶ Jorge Basadre, « José M. Eguren y la Nueva Poesía », in : *A.*, 3, novembre 1926, 7-8, ici 7.

²⁷ « El gesto de la palabra », Antenor Orrego, « La obra poética de Nicanor de La Puente [*sic*, pour Fuente] », in : *A.*, 15, avril 1928, 5-7, ici 6. L'article s'achève sur la nécessité de ne pas couper la poésie de la vie, tendance de la décadence européenne (le « purisme ») qu'il oppose au nécessaire « sentiment politique » [*sentido político*] (7).

²⁸ « poesía de gritos », César A. Rodríguez, « Carta a José Varallanos », in : *A.*, 18, 83-84, ici 83.

parle de « *desautorización*²⁹ »). La plupart des poètes adoptent également les dispositifs visuels expérimentés par les avant-gardes européennes une dizaine d'années plus tôt : le décrochage du vers « en créneau », les variations typographiques (en général assez dépouillées), voire la délinéarisation. Plusieurs écrivains n'hésitent pas à dénoncer l'usage pédant, artificiel et stéréotypé du lexique et des pratiques avant-gardistes. Pour César Vallejo, il y a là « singerie de l'Europe », puisque cette tendance ne correspondrait à aucune « sensibilité authentiquement neuve³⁰ » en Amérique. Au même moment, Federico Bolanos distingue cinq tendances dans la nouvelle littérature péruvienne : les « humains » (*humanos*) comme Hidalgo, Vallejo, Parra del Riego, Portal ; les « déshumanisés » (*deshumanizados*), plus esthétisants, comme Oquendo de Amat et Martín Adán ; les « nationalistes » (*nacionalistas*), férus d'indianisme ; les « internationaux » (*internacionales*), plus cosmopolites, voire cosmiques, comme Hidalgo, Abril, Oquendo de Amat ; enfin l'art prolétarien de Portal ou Miró Quesada. Il admet l'influence de l'avant-garde européenne, mais considère qu'elle prend en Amérique un caractère unique, dû en particulier à sa dimension synthétique³¹. Le débat reste aujourd'hui ouvert. Plusieurs théoriciens défendent l'idée qu'il n'y a pas imitation, ou qu'elle est dépassée, en raison des apports indubitables de l'Amérique du Sud à une pratique poétique nouvelle³² : pour Nelson Osorio, il ne s'agit pas d'un décalque, mais d'une contribution à un processus devenu international³³. Mais Mirko Lauer, plus proche de Mariátegui, considère que l'avant-garde n'a été qu'un moment de convergence, un passage obligatoire, mais bref³⁴.

²⁹ Miguel Ángel Huamán, « Fundamentos de la crítica literaria de JCM », in : *Amauta y su época*, 299. Voir aussi ses travaux sur Gamaliel Churata et le groupe de Puno.

³⁰ « una sensibilidad auténticamente nueva », César Vallejo, « Poesía nueva », *A.*, 3, novembre 1926, 17, où il oppose la simplicité de la nouvelle sensibilité à la pédanterie du lexique et des métaphores scientifiques et technologiques que pratiquent certains poètes à l'image de l'Europe (cette critique est récurrente : voir la deuxième partie de l'introduction de Mirko Lauer à son anthologie *La Polémica del vanguardismo : 1916-1928*, Lima 2001). Le « décalque simiesque » (el calco simiesco) est aussi dénoncé par Franz Tamayo. Voir aussi María Wiese, « Señales de nuestro tiempo », in : *A.*, 4, décembre 1926, 11-12, ici 11.

³¹ Federico Bolanos, « La nueva literatura peruana », in : *La Pluma* (Montevideo), X, février 1929, 73-7, cité dans *Vanguardia Latinoamericana*, 2005, Vol. 4, 209-14. Voir aussi le classement récent proposé par Mirko Lauer, *La Polémica del vanguardismo*, 11-13.

³² Américo Ferrari, « La revista *Amauta* y las vanguardias poéticas peruanas », 326.

³³ Cité par David Wise, « Vanguardismo a 3800 metros : el Caso del *Boletín Titikaka* (Puno, 1926-1930) », in : *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana*, 20, 1984, 89-100, ici 90.

³⁴ Mirko Lauer, « La poesía vanguardista en el Perú », in : *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana*, 15. D'une manière générale, voir ses travaux sur les avant-gardes péruviennes et ses rééditions.

Sans aucun doute, il y a eu, en surface, une influence des avant-gardes européennes sur les avant-gardes latino-américaines, mais ce constat ne mène pas loin, à une époque où tout s'internationalise. L'une des tentatives pour dépasser la question de l'articulation Amériques/Europe, élève/modèle, est précisément la revendication de l'internationalisme³⁵, relayé par des concepts moins marqués politiquement, comme « mondialisme » ou « universalisme » (« nécessité d'une culture universelle³⁶ », affirme par exemple Franz Tamayo). L'articulation du national et de l'international s'expérimente au sein de ce que David Wise appelle un « réseau supranational³⁷ », l'espace de l'Amérique latine. Reste la question de la part qu'il faut faire au localisme, si l'on peut qualifier ainsi la place que tous les écrivains et artistes qu'accueille *Amanta* tiennent à assigner à la culture indigène.

La question de la rupture est donc doublement au cœur de l'avant-garde péruvienne, et de là vient peut-être son ambivalence : d'un côté, la relation avec l'Europe ; d'un autre, l'articulation entre rupture (avant-gardiste) et réaffirmation d'une tradition. Le deuxième débat porte, on l'aura compris, sur le caractère avant-gardiste de cette littérature : si l'une des originalités de l'avant-garde péruvienne – et d'une bonne partie des avant-gardes d'Amérique centrale et du Sud – est d'avoir fortement lié avant-garde et combat socio-politique, au point de considérer cette orientation comme ce qui les distingue des « ismes » européens, cette politisation ne se fait-elle pas au détriment de la dimension expérimentale ? Car, comme le signale Jorge Schwartz :

Comment maintenir un « esprit nouveau » et une « nouvelles sensibilité » sans perdre les caractéristiques régionalistes ? Comment assimiler les techniques nouvelles mises en place en Europe et contribuer à l'évolution littéraire de son pays sans tomber dans l'imitation ou devenir la victime du modèle importé ? Et d'un autre côté, comment exprimer le national sans tomber dans les limites appauvrissantes de la « couleur locale » ?³⁸

Il semble assez manifeste que la plupart des artistes péruviens du début du XX^e siècle se sont posé le problème dans les termes où Jorge Schwartz l'aborde.

³⁵ Sur cet aspect, voir José Morales Saravia, « César Vallejo y la internacionalización », in: *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana*, 20, 1984, 55-78.

³⁶ « *necesidad de cultura universal* », dans: Franz Tamayo, « Autoctonismo y europeismo », 87.

³⁷ David Wise, « Vanguardismo a 3800 metros », 100.

³⁸ Jorge Schwartz, *Las Vanguardias latinoamericanas. Textos programáticos y críticos*, Madrid 1991, 494.

Indigénisme et primitivisme

Les enjeux de la rupture ne peuvent cependant qu'être très différents entre pays colonisés et pays dominants. Il est évident que l'Amérique latine voit dans la revendication d'une tradition indigène opprimée un élément de rupture³⁹. Sans doute semble-t-on là aux antipodes du futurisme italien (quels que soient ses rapports réels à la tradition, il ne la revendique pas), et de toutes les approches qui veulent réduire les avant-gardes à « l'anti-tradition ». Mais une réflexion analogue a été menée en Europe par les avant-gardes russes et, plus largement, une tendance « primitiviste » traverse indubitablement l'ensemble des avant-gardes historiques. L'originalité de l'avant-garde péruvienne (et indo-américaine) tient au fait que la réévaluation, ou la défense, de la tradition reste d'actualité, et est donc aisément compatible avec la volonté de nouveauté. *Amauta*, qui se place d'emblée sous le signe de l'indigénisme, par son titre, hommage à l'« *incaísmo* », par la présence d'études ethnologiques ou économiques analysant la situation des Indiens (la bataille pour le statut des Indiens fait partie des objectifs de la revue), par la place, enfin, faite aux auteurs et artistes « indigénistes » (en particulier ceux du groupe de Puno) et au débat esthétique (en particulier dans le cadre d'une polémique autour du thème « *Auctonomismo y europeísmo* », dans les numéros 17 et 18), souligne à la fois sa modernité et son originalité :

El « indigenismo » de nuestra literatura actual no está desconectado de los demás elementos nuevos de esta hora. [...] Se equivocan gravemente quienes [...] lo consideran, en conjunto, artificioso. [...] Esta corriente, de otro lado, encuentra un estímulo en la asimilación por nuestra literatura de elementos de cosmopolitismo.⁴⁰

C'est aussi en ces termes que les auteurs publiés par *Amauta* s'expriment. Ils prennent position contre toutes les approches qui ne considéreraient les civilisations indiennes que sur le mode de la nostalgie : l'indianisme du XIX^e siècle, dont on dénonce le caractère exotique, de même que « l'américanisme absolu⁴¹ » (celui qui cherche à remonter le temps et nie

³⁹ Voir Hector Alimondo, « *Klaxon y Festa*, dos revistas brasileñas contemporáneas de *Amauta* », in: *Amauta y su época*, 267-76.

⁴⁰ « L'indigénisme, dans notre littérature actuelle, n'est pas coupé des nombreux éléments nouveaux de l'heure. [...] Ceux qui le considèrent dans l'ensemble comme artificiel [...] se trompent lourdement. [...] Ce courant, d'un autre côté, a trouvé un stimulant dans l'assimilation par notre littérature d'éléments cosmopolites ». J.C.M., « Las Corrientes de hoy. El indigenismo » (1927), repris dans *Siete ensayos*, 238.

⁴¹ « americanismo absoluto », dans: Tamayo, « Autoctonismo y europeismo », 86.

l'Europe en bloc) que rejette Franz Tamayo. L'indigénisme, au contraire, s'attache à ancrer la civilisation indienne dans le présent, y compris politique. Il s'agit dès lors plutôt de travailler à rendre contemporaine une tradition nationale dans un monde moderne et en mouvement : pour Martí Casanova, un « autochtonisme américain⁴² » dynamique ne repose pas sur les ruines, mais sur la réalité contemporaine. La situation socio-politique est donc considérée à la fois comme le moyen d'échapper à la tentation de l'anecdote pittoresque, et comme élément de rupture avec la démarche des avant-gardes européennes, expression de l'impérialisme que l'indigénisme dénonce⁴³. C'est une analyse que rejoindra Jorge Schwartz, selon lequel le détour par l'Europe et le cosmopolitisme sont les outils qui permettent aux auteurs sud-américains de faire évoluer le nationalisme du XIX^e siècle (qui privilégie la « couleur locale »), en même temps que la revendication indigéniste leur permet de ne pas retomber dans une relation de dépendance⁴⁴. Le *Boletín Titikaka*, étonnante revue en apparence coupée du monde (Puno, où elle est publiée, se trouve à 4000 m d'altitude à la frontière du Pérou et de la Bolivie), ce que semble confirmer le fait qu'elle ne cite aucun artiste européen et se présente en rupture complète avec le modèle européen, illustre cette analyse :

El arte vanguardista de hoy [...] ofrece [...] un doble aspecto. Por un lado, lucha contra el modo i formar del pensar europeo i trata di forjar su personalidad, i, por otro, frente a la cuestión social del mundo, encarna un apostolado : el de la justicia⁴⁵.

La revue se pense donc d'emblée comme travail de synthèse de l'esthétique et du politique, du nationalisme et du mondialisme : le « *neo indio* », affirment les frères Peralta, est « le produit de la fusion des races de l'Indoamérique⁴⁶ ». De même, l'œuvre poétique d'Alejandro Peralta, également publié dans *Amanta*, semble réaliser la fusion des orientations issues d'Europe (le caractère documentaire, le travail visuel, etc.) et de la thématique indigéniste qui caractériserait les Amériques.

⁴² « autoctonismo americano », Casanova, « Autoctonismo y europeismo », Réplica, 78.

⁴³ Casanova, « Autoctonismo y europeismo », Réplica, 81.

⁴⁴ Jorge Schwartz, *Las Vanguardias latinoamericanas*, ch. « Nacionalismo vs cosmopolitismo ».

⁴⁵ « L'art d'avant-garde aujourd'hui [...] offre [...] un double aspect. D'un côté, il lutte contre le mode de pensée européen et cherche à forger sa personnalité ; d'un autre, face à la question sociale dans le monde, il incarne un apostolat : celui de la justice ». *Boletín Titikaka*, 1, septembre 1927 (page 60 du *fac-simile*).

⁴⁶ « el producto de la fusión de razas en Indoamérica », *Boletín Titikaka*, 1, septembre 1927 (page 60 du *fac-simile*).

L'indigénisme serait donc ce point paradoxal où l'avant-garde péruvienne rejoint certaines avant-gardes européennes, invitant à rouvrir la question de la place du primitivisme dans la définition de la démarche avant-gardiste, et à repréciser la ligne qui partage les deux futurismes européens. Si la place accordée par *Amauta* à la littérature russe s'explique par des choix idéologiques, on ne peut qu'être sensible à l'écho que les analyses d'Ilya Ehrenburg ou de Lunatcharsky doivent rencontrer chez les artistes péruviens⁴⁷. Dès le n° 3 est traduit un texte où Ehrenburg explique la rupture qu'a constituée la littérature russe issue de la révolution. Son analyse est, à plus d'un titre, intéressante : il délaisse bien sûr les futuristes⁴⁸, tout en justifiant les thématiques machinistes (l'ivresse technologique correspond aux débuts de l'industrialisation, mais aussi à une forme d'européanisation) ; il insiste sur la tendance « orientaliste » et présente la Russie comme le mélange de deux sangs. Dans les années 1920, cette réflexion des Russes ne peut pas constituer un « modèle » pour l'Amérique du Sud, qui s'est depuis longtemps déjà saisie de la question, mais la rencontre est manifeste. L'analyse qu'en proposent les communistes, qui insistent sur la dimension populaire de la démarche (on passe alors du « primitivisme » au « moujikisme »), ouvre une voie politique qui permet à l'indigénisme d'intégrer la réalité contemporaine ; mais les artistes péruviens suivent une voie plus ethnographique, s'attachant à construire une culture indo-américaine qui conjugue pratiques contemporaines et histoire, analyse et création artistique, régionalisme et trans-nationalisme, indubitablement en rupture avec l'art dominant.

La nouvelle relation qui s'établit avec les arts européens à partir du moment où ils ne sont plus modèle, mais écho, met indubitablement l'Amérique latine dans une situation inédite de dialogue. En parallèle, la reconnaissance du « métissage⁴⁹ » culturel comme constituant possible d'une identité artistique ouvre des pistes dont le XX^e siècle a montré la fécondité. En somme, le « rite de passage européen » a tenu sa fonction d'initiation.

⁴⁷ Il m'est difficile de préciser à l'heure actuelle si cet impact du futurisme et, en général, de la littérature russe, est une caractéristique générale des avant-gardes latino-américaines, et je ne connais pas de synthèse sur la question, mais elle est également manifeste dans les revues argentines, chiliennes ou mexicaines. Ce rapprochement mériterait assurément une étude approfondie.

⁴⁸ Dans les années 1920, le futurisme russe fait, on le sait, l'objet de débats acharnés. Ehrenburg cite donc Maïakowski et Pasternak, mais pas Khlebnikov, tout en mentionnant les recherches des futuristes.

⁴⁹ Le terme est employé, voir par exemple J.C.M., *Siete Ensayos*, Martí Casanovas, « Autoctonismo y europeismo », Réplica, 83. On trouve une idée proche dans le concept d'« anthropophagie », version « primitiviste » de l'*innutritio* proposée par les Brésiliens à l'époque.

Carpentier's Marvellous Real: Modernity and its Discontents in the Tropics

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Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) has most often been hailed as an author whose work prepared the ground for the *boom* in Latin American fiction. His well-known notion of *lo real maravilloso*, or the marvellous real, has customarily been situated in a genealogical account of *el realismo mágico*. In literary history Carpentier's Prologue to *El Reino de Este Mundo* (The Kingdom of this World, 1949), where he first introduced the idea of *lo real maravilloso*, has generally been regarded as the first manifesto of Latin American magical realism.¹ Although there is a clear relationship between the two terms, I argue that *lo real maravilloso* resists being assimilated into magical realism as a crucial moment in its pre-history. Critics of Carpentier's notion have read in it the positing of an ontological origin for Latin America. So far, the majority of criticism written on the work of Carpentier has understood *lo real maravilloso* as an essentialist notion, then, either as a seminal moment in the development of an authentic Latin American literature or as nothing more than a repressed European exoticism. This, too, I argue, needs qualification when we relate his views of Latin America and the Baroque to the European (in particular the surrealist) avant-gardes. Carpentier, indeed, tried to flesh out a specifically Latin American voice transcending the limitations of European experience, but did so without recouring to essentialism.

Alexis Márquez Rodríguez's important introductory volume to Carpentier's *Obras Completas* canonizes the essentialist reading. Rodríguez claims that, "For Alejo Carpentier, America is a world that is essentially

¹ See, for example, the Prologue's inclusion in the volume, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, Durham 1995. Most of the volume's contributors addressing Carpentier immediately assume that *lo real maravilloso* is identical with "magical realism." Like the term "boom", the conflation of *lo real maravilloso* with *el realismo mágico* has been established in a dynamics of translation that further complicates things. The term "realismo mágico" entered the Spanish language as a translation of the German "magischer Realismus" used by Franz Roh in his 1925 study of post-expressionist painting.

marvellously-real [...]. Carpentier's idea implies that, in relation to the American reality, the marvellous is not a simple descriptive qualification. Rather, it concerns a metaphysical and ontological identification".² After appealing to Aristotle, Rodríguez argues that *lo real maravilloso* names and thus secures an American essence and identity. In one of the best known passages of the Prologue, indeed, Carpentier's own exposition of *lo real maravilloso* alludes to America's "virgin landscape, its formation, its ontology".³ Here Carpentier himself seems to be making an ontological claim for *lo real maravilloso*. He goes on to insist that "the sensation of the marvellous presupposes a faith",⁴ implying that such faith still exists in the Americas precisely to the extent that the marvellous is not something which is sought after, but something which simply exists out there to be encountered in its essence. In particular, Carpentier singles out surrealism as typical of an unhappy European consciousness that seeks an experience of the marvellous but can only claim to find it through the "tricks of literary artifice".⁵ Along this line of thought, the surrealist *merveilleux* and more generally the European search for the marvellous, takes place as a response to an original loss of faith. This loss of faith occurs as a consequence of a crisis in which existence is felt to lack any essential foundation that would guarantee its sense. Under such conditions, the marvellous can be nothing more than an empty placeholder for the Edenic harmony between existence and essence that is irretrievably lost in the fall into consciousness. When read within this context, clearly present in the Prologue, the term *lo real maravilloso* does indeed posit an American existence whose essential and singular quality is its direct and immediate access to its own essence.

However, a more detailed reading of Carpentier's work shows that *lo real maravilloso* does not simply point to the revelation of an essence, but also accounts for the event of revelation itself. He writes: "The marvellous begins to be itself unequivocally when it surges forth from an unforeseen alteration in reality (miracle), a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed or singularly favourable illumination of the unseen richness of reality".⁶ If *lo real maravilloso* arises from an unexpected alteration of reality, one could say that this notion amounts to the disappearance of all stable

² Alexis Márquez Rodríguez, *Lo Barroco y lo Real Maravilloso en la Obra de Alejo Carpentier*, México 1982, 55.

³ Alejo Carpentier, *Obras Completas*, Vol. 2, México 1983, 17. Unless indicated differently, all translations are mine.

⁴ Carpentier, *Obras*, Vol. 2, 15.

⁵ Carpentier, *Obras*, Vol. 2, 15.

⁶ Carpentier, *Obras*, Vol. 2, 15.

forms and essences. This new “explosion of forms” is the expression of what he calls the “Baroque”.⁷ Following the lead of Catalan critic Eugenio D’Ors, whom he mentions frequently throughout this piece, he speaks of a “Baroque spirit”. Since it is not a historical style, this Baroque spirit “may reappear at any given moment”.⁸ In his argument for a Baroque spirit, Carpentier repeatedly makes use of Breton’s own statements in the manifestos of surrealism in order to suggest an analogy with a “surrealist spirit”, and ultimately he declares that “the development of surrealism was totally Baroque”.⁹ In short, French (European) surrealism, too, is presented as a historical manifestation of the larger Baroque spirit – and I shall return to the precise tenor of the Baroque in this respect further on.

Carpentier’s position after his eleven-year stay in Paris (1928-39) oscillates ambivalently between his engagement with surrealism and his repudiation of its main tenets. Like its predecessor dada, surrealism was hardly a fixed school of ideas. Proclaiming themselves “specialists in revolt”, the surrealists announced in their many manifestoes and proclamations the dissolution of all dogma or social constraints that inhibit the free expression of the artist’s creative impulses. “The systematic utilization of dreams, of automatic writing, the rejection of controlled reflex, the abolition of schedules”,¹⁰ these were the principal means by which they would dismantle the barriers between the waking world and the unconscious. It makes sense that in a movement with such animosity to structure, the suspicion that André Breton wanted to establish himself as the single figure of authority would provoke dissent from members. Surrealism had many critics. As a self-proclaimed political as well as artistic movement most of these disagreements took place in the context of the great political divides anticipated during the years preceding the Second World War and established during the German occupation of Vichy. Within this divide surrealism saw itself as a radical alternative to the intellectual tradition of the French Communist Party, whose members denounced surrealism as nihilist shock effect, as well as to the modernist movements, many of whose intellectuals would succumb to the lure of fascism.¹¹ Surrealism was perhaps the last attempt to revolt against a

⁷ Carpentier, *Obras*, Vol. 2, 93.

⁸ Carpentier, *Obras*, Vol. 2, 95.

⁹ Carpentier, *Obras*, Vol. 2, 98.

¹⁰ Pierre Mabille, *Le Miroir du Merveilleux*, Paris 1940, 53.

¹¹ Here I refer to a political divide which occurred not only within the surrealist movement but within the larger intellectual arena of Europe, as authors and artists such as Léger, Malraux, Aragon and Tzara joined the ideological ranks of the French Communist Party

frozen factuality in which, as Lukács had described it,¹² the reality that just happened to exist persisted in a totally senseless unchanging way.

Carpentier arrived in Paris in 1928, and during the first five years of his stay in the mecca of the new, he established contacts with the different surrealist groups. He grew increasingly critical of the surrealist movement, and by 1930 he was among the many writers and intellectuals who signed the pamphlet "Un Cadavre". With its occasional Christian overtones, evident for example in the rhetoric of "grace", and the strict guidelines directing the deportment of its members, surrealism as led by Breton would continually invite comparisons with a new orthodoxy. Nowhere was that tendency more noticeable than in the infamous case of "Un Cadavre", the polemical fallout precipitated by the publication of the second *Manifeste du Surréalisme*. For most of the contributors to this publication – a long list which includes Bataille, Raymond Queneau, Robert Desnos, Roger Vitrac and Carpentier among others – the indictment against Breton seems to have been more of a foregone conclusion than an open question.

Arriving at the center of these debates, Carpentier at first found a welcoming community of shared interests in Paris. The surrealists closely resembled the avant-garde circle of the journal *Avance* he had left behind in Cuba. This group had also adopted the formal and linguistic experimentation popular in Europe during the 1920s and engaged with the philosophical debates of the times. In the widely influential journal *Revista de Occidente*¹³ particular attention was paid to the works of Oswald Spengler, Hegel, Freud and a host of other thinkers. Yet, it was the German historian Spengler whose works exerted the most enduring influence on Carpentier and would provide in many ways the theoretical grounds upon which he would renounce surrealism for an authentic Latin American aesthetic.¹⁴

and Dalí, Céline, Pound, Marinetti, and Lawrence had brief and in some cases extended flirtations with fascist ideas.

¹² See Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance", in: *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, Mass. 1981, 28-59, here 36-7.

¹³ *Revista de Occidente*, founded by Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in 1923 and distributed in Europe and Latin America, was a forum for debate and widespread engagement with ideas of philosophers and cultural analysts such as Freud, Edmund Husserl, Bertrand Russell.

¹⁴ From early on, Carpentier refers to Spengler and his importance for the development of his own theories. In a series of essays entitled "El Ocaso de Europa" ("The Dusk of Europe") published in the Cuban journal *Carteles* in 1941, in his crucial Prologue, "The Baroque and the Marvellous Real", to *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), and in the novel *El Siglo de las Luces* (Explosion in a Cathedral, 1962), he elaborates on the decline of the old

Critique of the Enlightenment: Modernity and its Discontents

In the 1920s, Spengler's organicist theories of the cyclical trajectory of History in his major work *The Decline of the West* (1918-23), stood out among conventional histories defending notions of history as a progression towards enlightenment. For an intellectual class faced with a World War, inter-imperial rivalry and domestic social disruption, an enlightened historical resolution appeared most unlikely. If the narrative of history were true to Hegel's optimistic spirit, striving in its progress towards freedom and the "Absolute", such aspirations seemed hard to find for the individual Western historical subject, who in that era was poised on the brink of nihilism and self-destruction. The pessimism at the end of the First World War, which seemed to indicate the approaching end of Europe's historical development, prepared the ground for the reception of Spengler's theories of decline and regeneration.

According to the Spenglerian paradigm, the different cultures of the world were atomized sites of historical development.¹⁵ *The Decline of the West* was one of the few historical studies of that time which had a global perspective encompassing the Americas, Asia and Africa. For Spengler, the replacement of old Europe as a leading world power could come from anywhere, the non-European world holding as much potential to change the direction of world history as any other world culture. In addition to the controversial nature of the work's prophetic historiography, the claim that modern Western culture was only one among many possible methods of human organization which could effect global influence caused considerable dispute and offered the historical establishment further evidence of the work's eclecticism and dubious arguments. A sweeping comparative study, categorizing the civilizations of every historical epoch according to only four possible manifestations of historical "Destiny" (Faustian, Magian, Classical, and Apollonian), *The Decline of the West* was in the opinion of the era's historians a specious ethnography in its propensity to draw grand historical conclusions from hackneyed cultural generalizations.

What is most important for Carpentier's earlier works, is the particularism that Spengler's theory of historical development affords in its proposed paradigm of world civilization as a large group of cyclically developing organisms. World History, thus conceived, can be understood

continent and the creative potential of the Americas. For further elaboration see Roberto González Echevarría's insightful study, *Carpentier, the Pilgrim at Home*, Ithaca 1977, 55-6; and Andreas Kurz, "Alejo Carpentier y *La decadencia de Occidente*", in: *Temas*, 39-40, 2004, 135-40.

¹⁵ See esp, section III "The Problem of World-History", 70-86, in Charles F. Atkinson's translation, Oxford 1991[1929].

as the externalization of a hidden essence or, in Spengler's vitalist term, "life".¹⁶ In Carpentier's view, the hidden essence and root of the Americas finds expression in *lo real maravilloso*, his complex aesthetic ideal. Carpentier did not envision the marvellous real as simply the mode of expression unique to the Americas, akin to Herder's *Nationalcharakteristik*, rather he characterized it as the expressive force found "in one's own surroundings, in what is tangible in the Americas, and in that which man perceives all around him".¹⁷ Similar to Spengler's notion of cultural morphology, in which external artifacts – political and cultural institutions, architectural forms, economic organizations – are the outward manifestation of an elementary life force that drives the historical destiny of a given people, Carpentier's marvellous real, then, *seems* more an ontological assertion than a simple aesthetic ideal, fleshing out a variety of proper and irreducible features of the Americas.

Spengler's appeal to certain European avant-gardists,¹⁸ who were attempting to create an aesthetic that could "face death and nothingness victoriously",¹⁹ is understandable given the historical circumstances. Disillusionment with the political and social institutions that claimed the unquestionable strength of enlightened reason as the foundation of their social practices grew, in part as a result of the inability of the European

¹⁶ Early on in *The Decline of the West*, Spengler writes, "Is it possible to find life itself – for human history is the sum of mighty life-courses which already have had to be endowed with ego and personality, in customary thought and expresión, by predicating entities of a higher order like 'the Classical' or 'the Chinese culture,' 'Modern Civilization' – a series of stages which must be traversed, and traversed moreover in an ordered and obligatory sequence? For everthing organic the notions of Birth, death, Routh, age, Lifetime are fundamentales – may not these notions, in this sphere also, possess a rigorous meaning which no one has yet extracted". Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 3.

¹⁷ Alejo Carpentier, "Tientos y Diferencias", in: *Alejo Carpentier: Ensayos*, México 1982, 43.

¹⁸ A good number of ideas of surrealist and avant-gardist writers and artists resonate with Spengler's theses. Among them are anthropologist Pierre Mabilie (*Le Miroir des Merveilles*, 1940), painter Max Ernst (his visions of ruined/emergent civilizations of the mid-1930s, such as *La Ville Entière*, and his earlier *Horde* paintings of the late 1920s), and Federico García Lorca (in his "Play and Theory of the Duende", originally delivered as a lecture in Buenos Aires in 1933). Spengler's widespread presence among Latin American and Caribbean intellectuals was also crucial, namely in Guatemalan writer Miguel Ángel Asturias (most notably in his novel *Hombres de Maíz*, 1926), Cuban José Lezama Lima (in his essays *La Expresión Americana*, 1969), and the group around the journal *Tropiques*, especially the work of Aimé Césaire. One can also trace clear parallels between Spengler's ideas and William Butler Yeats' theories of history, especially those developed his *A Vision* (1926), more precisely in section "Speculum Angelorum et Hominum." See Nicholas Allen, "Yeats, Spengler, and *A Vision* after Empire", in: Michael Valdez-Moses & Richard Begam (eds.), *Modernism and Colonialism in British and Irish Literature*, 1899-1939, Durham 2007, 209-25.

¹⁹ Michel Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, Tuscaloosa 1974, 6.

political and intellectual establishment to recognize the often horrific and barbaric consequences of progress. Although the social, political and economic institutions of the modern nation state, which were the legacy of the Enlightenment, proclaimed reason as their guide and their adherence to the absolute ideal of a social good, these institutions also became the mechanism through which unimaginable acts of exploitation, war and terror were planned and executed.

The Frankfurt School's critique of the Enlightenment and Spengler's historical pessimism converged in several apposite ways here,²⁰ most notably in the idea that the Enlightenment would finally give way to barbarism in the West, and in the notion of an inevitable historical stasis as the West settled in the reproduction of industrial capitalism. This shared conceptualization of stasis and barbarism is evident in Adorno's essay "Spengler After the Decline", where the enigmatic significance of *The Decline of the West* on interwar politics and culture is discussed:

His [Spengler's] prediction is fulfilled even more strikingly in the static state of culture, the most advanced efforts of which have been denied understanding, and a genuine reception by society since the nineteenth century. This static state compels the incessant and deadly repetition of what has already been accepted, and at the same time standardized art for the masses, with its petrified formulas, excludes history. All specifically modern art can be regarded as an attempt to keep the dynamic of history alive through magic, or to increase the horror at the stasis to shock, to portray the catastrophe in which the ahistorical suddenly begins to look archaic [...]. Thus, history seems to have been extinguished.²¹

Like Spengler, Adorno also considered the cultural event as the basis for historical being.²² In evaluating the relevance of Spengler's prediction of immanent doom and social return to war and aggression, Adorno notes that the function of culture is to assuage the modern subject, coercing him to experience the stasis of modernity as progressive change. In his view, popular culture in particular was the medium through which the ever-expanding domain of reification established itself in all aspects of daily life. As the formalistic revelation of high modernism illustrates in Joyce's descent into the inner monologue of one day in the life of Leopold

²⁰ For further elaboration of the similarities between the Frankfurt School and Oswald Spengler, see George Friedmann, *The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School*, Ithaca, 1981.

²¹ Theodor Adorno, "Spengler After the Decline", in: *Prisms*, tr. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Samuel Weber, Cambridge, Mass. 1982, 53-72, here 58-9.

²² Though culture was central to the Frankfurt School's examination of the crisis of historical subjectivity, they maintained, in opposition to Spengler's aestheticization of history, that the historical remained in dialectical relation with the socio-material.

Bloom, there is no new terrain to cover but that of the mind staggered by the weight of the inefficiency of decision or deed. Perhaps it is the mimetic shock of modernist "ahistoricity", its interminable "presentness", in the face of monumental destruction that could only be alleviated through a leap out of the continuum of time, which alarms Adorno in his ambiguous acceptance of Spengler.

Whereas Spengler's *Decline* is the swan song of the slow yet natural death of the ill-fated goals of the Enlightenment, which might in its demise give rise to another cycle of historical glory, Adorno on the contrary appears to be more deeply pessimistic. He does not see "decline" as the trajectory taken by history, rather the modern subject is caught in the radical stasis of ahistoricity. As Adorno would put it, dialectics had come to a standstill, despite appearances. Although disciplines such as anthropology, and history or artistic movements inspired by aesthetic "primitivists" would attempt to temporally displace the anxiety of ahistoricity onto the past as an essential feature of archaic and precapitalist cultures, Adorno asserts that modernity is also responsible for the reproduction of a most virulent form of timelessness.

Yet contrary to Adorno's pessimistic stance towards the ability of art to effect change or dismantle the social mechanisms which held Western culture in a state of historical paralysis, the aesthetic movements of the interwar years such as dada, surrealism, and their predecessors saw art as ineffectual in so far as it could not handle the ever resurfacing presence of absurdity, savagery and barbarism; for exposing such elements hidden in found objects, the free association of words, or in dreams and the unconscious were promising methods towards the destabilization of everyday life. Whereas the task of critical theory's sociological and philosophical approach to the examination of culture was to expose the dual nature of enlightenment, and to demystify the concepts which sterilized reason and the reality such concepts were meant to describe, the approach of the interwar aesthetic movements to this historical situation on the contrary celebrated the retreat of reason and sought out and embraced the source of human irrationality and absurdity.

What troubled Adorno and Horkheimer most about the failed dialectic of Enlightenment were the measures which bourgeois society would take to maintain historical stasis. In the name of progress and Enlightenment, Horkheimer elaborates,²³ the modern state employing "Instrumental reason" would utilize archaic and barbaric methods of

²³ Max Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State", in: *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, New York 1985, 95-117.

violence and terror – methods antithetical to the professed ideals of reason but justifiable in the continuation of these ideals as they became dialectically inverted. In this way reason came to sustain the reproduction of the *Immergleiche* (ever-identical).

Though deploying drastically different methods of explanation for the apparent crisis in the historical trajectory of reason, the many divergent factions of the European avant-garde agreed with the Lukács of *Theory of the Novel* (1920) that the modern industrial era was ushering in an indefinite period of disintegration. The early incarnation of his concept of reification – “an expression of the historical process of decay which emptied the meaning, the inner life, from both the aesthetic forms and the ideas which they articulated”²⁴ – anticipated the historical pessimism of both Spengler and the left avant-garde, as Susan Buck-Morss observes. The pervasive archaic barbarism that lay below the surface of polite civility and the rule of law, was a continual reminder that the irrepressible underside of the Enlightenment had become a force to be taken into account.

The Marvellous Real Revisited

Carpentier formulated his ideas on “The Baroque and the Marvellous Real” in a lecture that first appeared in printed form in the Prologue to his novel *El Reino de Este Mundo* (1949). Later he elaborated on *lo real maravilloso* in his third novel *Los Pasos Perdidos* (The Lost Steps, 1953). Carpentier was much committed to the Spenglerian notion of an impending European decline. In *Los Pasos Perdidos*, for example, the discourse of a decadent and declining Europe is the organizing principle of the narrative.

Through this quasi-autobiographical novel, Carpentier elaborates his critical position in relation to the circumstances which have determined the fate of the writer in Latin America. The title of the novel, with its allusion to André Breton’s book of the same title (*Les pas perdus*), hints at its self-critical stance. While the allusion has often been interpreted as Carpentier’s wish to disengage from his surrealist past, any consideration of the title cannot ignore the fact that Breton’s book, much like Carpentier’s, plays a crucial role in the development of his thought. Much as Breton’s book records his break with dada and the first explicit movements towards “surrealist” thought, *Los Pasos Perdidos* signals the beginning of Carpentier’s mature phase as a writer through a critical self-

²⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, New York 1977, 44.

evaluation of his earlier work. It can be argued that in characters such as Mouche, Carpentier clearly ridicules the superficial appropriations of surrealist thinking. As part of the self-criticism which pervades the novel, Carpentier may well be ridiculing his own superficial characterizations of surrealism in the Prologue to *El Reino de Este Mundo*. The narrator of the novel holds the surrealist clichés of the character Mouche in contempt, but totally fails to see how his own thinking is permeated with surrealist commonplaces. In this respect, the narrator presents an image of Carpentier's previously held assumptions. In his brief but dismissive discussion of surrealism in the Prologue, where he put forth a superficial understanding of surrealism while elaborating a theory of *lo real maravilloso*, Carpentier's discourse was, nevertheless, clearly marked by surrealist thinking. In the novel, however, Carpentier rejects seeing the cultural relations at work in terms of a simple opposition between *lo real maravilloso* and surrealism. *Los Pasos Perdidos* opens the way for grasping *lo real maravilloso* as an idea which, like the surreal, remains internally divided between differing logics. Carpentier's book thus disturbs the fundamental binary oppositions between the New and the Old World that have historically determined Latin Americanist discourse from both sides, and it is careful never to reduce the two sides to the unity of reflective identity. Quite possibly *Los Pasos Perdidos* clears the space for the emergence of an enduring difference that works over the entire history of that cultural object we call "Latin America".

In its opening pages *Los Pasos Perdidos* presents the narrator as a man and an artist who, through the increasing intrusion of economic forces into his creative activity, has been divorced from his own artistic production and, by extension, alienated from his entire existence. The action of the narrative is triggered by a chance encounter. As the narrator is wandering the streets alone, it begins to rain. From the retrospective position of his narration, the narrator describes the moment as "the first announcement – which I did not understand at the time – of the encounter".²⁵ Reminiscent as it is of the surrealist chance encounter and the attendant aura of grace, this presentation of what will be the inaugural moment, "in which the origin of everything would have to be sought" (14), highlights the degree to which surrealist discourse, despite the narrator's mockery of it, continues to structure his own thought. While

²⁵ Carpentier's *Los Pasos Perdidos* can be consulted in the original in *Obras Completas*, Vol. 2. México 1983. In what follows I use the edition *The Lost Steps*, tr. Harriet de Onís, Minneapolis 2001, referring parenthetically to page numbers only. The present quote can be found on page 13.

darting through the rain, the narrator stumbles into a personage simply referred to throughout the novel as el Curador, the Curator. The proximity of the Curador's title to that of "cura", Spanish for priest, already suggest the priestly role which he will quickly assume. In earlier days, the narrator had studied music under the guidance of this curator of the Museum of Organography. The Curador claims to have a "gift" for the narrator: a recording of a primitive musical instrument that sounds like a bird and which provides substantial proof for the narrator's youthful theories about the mimetic origins of music. Confronted with the intellectual endeavours of his earlier life, the narrator acutely feels the alienation of his present situation and tells the curator of his fate. "Like the sinner who empties into the confessional the dark sack of his inequities and lusts, deriving from talking ill of himself a kind of pleasure that verges upon self-abomination, I painted for my teacher, in the foulest colours, with the blackest dyes, the uselessness of my life" (22). Upon hearing this confession, the Curador remains silent, and suddenly "he made a strange gesture which made me think of an impossible power of absolution" (22). This gesture of absolution consists of nothing more than the Curador stretching out his arm to reach for the phone; but the phone call he places to an "invisible interlocutor" will procure for the narrator an opportunity, he believes, to overcome his present feelings of alienation.

With that phone call, the narrator begins a journey through the jungles of South America in search for the primitive instruments that will prove his theories about the origins of music. Initially, the narrator undertakes the journey under the persuasion of his mistress, Mouche, treating the entire endeavour as simply one more distraction from the uselessness of his life. They go so far as planning to have someone fabricate fake instruments and spend on themselves the money meant to finance the trip. The entire second chapter, however, stages a host of oppositions and relays between the culture of the metropolises (Europe and the United States) and the culture of Latin America. By the end of these exchanges, the narrator – who, like Carpentier himself, was born of a European father and a Spanish American mother – decides to "fulfill my obligation to the Curator and the university and honestly complete the task which had been entrusted to me" (75).

The search for the primitive instruments, which is ultimately a search for origins, becomes the means by which the narrator hopes to reclaim an identity that is properly and originally his, thereby asserting his independence and freedom. The desire that underwrites the essentialist reduction of *lo real maravilloso* thus figures in *Los Pasos Perdidos* as a search for origins. Obtaining the instruments, like the securing of an authentic Latin Ameri-

can identity, presents itself as the means by which a substantial freedom will be attained.

When the narrator finally finds the instruments, he emphasizes their mystical quality and speaks of them as if they were holy relics gesturing towards their fetishistic nature. Shortly after laying hold of the instruments, however, the narrator has the sudden realization that his "old theory about the origins of music was absurd" (199), which consequently means that the instruments themselves have lost their allure. The apparent sudden change in the narrator's attitude is precipitated by an encounter with "a people of a culture much earlier" than that of those from whom he had acquired the instruments the previous day. While mingling among these people, the narrator observes a shamanistic death-ritual which had the effect, as he writes, of "blinding me with the realization that I had just witnessed the Birth of Music" (185). With this revelation which seems to lift to veil and reveal the falsity of the instruments and the theories they were supposed to support, the instruments truly begin to work their magic.

While the narrator disclaims the details of his previous theory after witnessing the ritual, he retains everything essential about it. In fact, the ritual confirmed the most fundamental part of his thesis; as he says, "what I had seen confirmed, to be sure, the thesis of those who argue that music had a magic origin" (200). The narrator does change his tune, however, about the manner in which such theories are produced. He rejects his previous theory as typical of Western academic "Musical circles in which ideas all come from books" (201). While he had developed his theories long ago in a metropolis far removed from the daily existence of primitive man, the narrator now knows that "I was present, a few days ago, at the birth of music" (200). The narrator believes he stood in the presence of a miraculous and revelatory birth. He appeals over and over to that which "I had *seen* [he *visto*]" (200, Carpentier's emphasis). At this moment, the narrator has indeed gained a new access to a primitive origin; which he understands as the promise of a new mode of existence. Clearly believing to have experienced a secret, the narrator at this moment is still too much of a surrealist and, at the same time, not enough of one. At its limit, surrealist thinking would unleash the liberating moment of such an experience as the event of existence's disclosure in the very withdrawal of any determined essence.

Throughout his journey, the narrator has been guided by a Greek miner named Yannes and a mysterious fellow known simply as the "Adelantado" who, as all the characters know, has a secret. Although the exact nature of the secret is unknown to the narrator until that moment, the speculation has been that he had discovered a "fabulous load of gold"

(127). The title “Adelantado”, literally “advanced”, was the term given to the governors of those regions of the Spanish Empire that lay along its frontier. In Spanish America, the use of the title extends as far back as Bartolomé Colon who, as governor of Hispaniola, was given the title by his brother Christopher Columbus. As the title would suggest, the Adelantado is, in fact, a sovereign figure of sorts, but he is not “a king of runaway slaves” (179) digging for gold. Rather, “the truth is much more beautiful” (180), for the Adelantado had founded a city hidden away within the jungle. While the narrator learns what the Adelantado keeps secret immediately before he witnesses the ritual, he does not relate the content of the secret, which is to say that the reader does not learn of it, until after the ritual; the reader thus gaining critical distance to reflect on the narrator’s actions and thought.

As the narrative of *Los Pasos Perdidos* makes quite clear, even if the narrator himself seems unaware of this fact, the community of Santa Mónica de los Venados, which holds the liberating promise of a new beginning, resembles in its most essential structures the Old World. The narrator makes the decision to stay in Santa Mónica: “I had made the great decision not to return [...]. I would liberate myself from the fate of Sisyphus, which was laid upon me by the world I came from [...]. I prefer to wield saw and axe rather than go on prostituting music in the announcer’s trade” (198). Nevertheless, his need for paper and ink makes him leave the colony with a search party that has been sent to find him in order to procure more paper and ink, after which he returns with, as he writes, “the few things I needed to live a life as full as that of all the others there” (236). Immediately upon returning, however, the narrator finds himself appropriated by the press machine. In his absence, the popular media have inscribed the narrator in an adventure story, characteristic of the popular colonialist imagination, and according to which he “was lost in the jungle, possibly a prisoner of head-hunting Indians” (288). Under these conditions, the narrator decides that his best option is simply to succumb to this melodrama and intervene with his personal testimony which would guard the secret of Santa Mónica:

What I would sell was a tall story to which I had been putting the finishing touches during the trip. I was held prisoner by a tribe that was suspicious rather than cruel; I finally managed to escape, crossing all alone, hundreds of miles of jungle; lost and hungry, I reached the ‘mission’ where they found me. I had in my suitcase a famous novel by a South American writer, giving the names of animals, trees, native legends, long-forgotten events, everything needed to lend a ring of authenticity to my narration (242-3).

The narrator demonstrates his belief that he can master the situation through a simple reappropriation. At this point, he attempts to seize hold of a prefabricated narrative that caters to the ideological fantasies of his public and employs it to his own purposes. In doing so, the narrator hopes to earn enough money with his story such that "I should feel less remorse at asking for a divorce" (243). Here, not only has the narrator taken hold of a preexisting narrative, but his choice of narrative is predetermined by the simple fact that he had already "become the hero of a novel" (233).

Among the competing narratives determining the narrator's social standing, the narrative of the "man, who if the truth were told, had gone off to the jungle with his mistress" (246) ultimately wins out. At this point the narrator encounters the limits of the forgiveness proffered by the curator and the establishment: "The newspaper could not forgive me for the money they had spent on my rescue, or for having made me a transgressor of the Law, an object of abomination. I had to sell my story for almost nothing to a third-rate magazine" (256). Being able to pay off his wife and return to Santa Mónica, the narrator falls into an unspecified period of economic destitution and emotional depression. When the narrator finally does return to the region, he is unable to retrace his steps through the jungle and find his way back to Santa Mónica. Reflecting upon his inability to return, the narrator observes, "One day I had made the unforgivable mistake of turning back, thinking that a miracle could be repeated, and on my return I found the setting changed, the landmarks wiped out, and the faces of the guides new" (271). The narrator discovers by the end of the novel that he cannot return to Santa Mónica after having been drawn away from it by the necessities of exchange. This "return" to Santa Mónica is but a repetition, however, of his initial voyage, which was always already conceptualized as a "return".

Having seen how *Los Pasos Perdidos* may be read as a critique of the processes by which *lo real maravilloso* undergoes an essentialist reduction, the stage is now set for demonstrating the continued presence of *lo real maravilloso* throughout Carpentier's career. Despite the implied critique of essentialism in *Los Pasos Perdidos*, Carpentier never abandoned the term *lo real maravilloso*. More precisely, he never ceased recouring to this term, while at the same time never conceptualising it. In other words, Carpentier would repeatedly return to *lo real maravilloso* as the nominal site of a persistent performance, an enduring intellectual labour, through which he sought to open the Americas to their eventual freedom. Doing so required, first of all, that the term never settled into a fixed determination, but kept on functioning as a term whose potential signification was continually revisited and actualized through incessant revision. *Lo real*

maravilloso thus never assumed a stable form, but on the contrary, always recalls Carpentier's statement in his Prologue that *lo real maravilloso* amounts to the ruination of all stable forms. And, conspicuously, in Carpentier's discourse, this "explosion of forms" is the expression of what he calls the "Baroque" (93).

Placing *lo real maravilloso* in relation to the "Baroque" constitutes one of the major moves in his ongoing elaboration. Crucial for Carpentier's elaboration on the Baroque was his reading of Eugenio D'Ors' 1935 collection of essays *Lo Barroco*.²⁶ In this volume, D'Ors (1882-1954) suggested a concept of the Baroque beyond historical, geographical or disciplinary boundaries and the development of a theory that links style immediately to culture. This collection, written in opposition to traditional historical theories of the Baroque as the product of a limited time period, approaches the Baroque as follows:

The Baroque is a historically constant feature that reappears across ages as reciprocally far removed as *Alejandro* is from the Counter-Reformation or the latter from the 'Turn-of-the-century', that is to say, from the final years of the 19th century, and it has cropped up in the most diverse regions, in the East as much as in the West.²⁷

These ideas prepare us to understand key aspects relating not only to the Baroque style but to style in general, since for D'Ors the same style can manifest itself in different time periods and geographical areas. In fact, style functions as a transtemporal system, whose elements "bind", that is, they relate apparently disparate forms and emphasize their similarities. "Estilo", thus, is the element that is expressed on a cultural and not on a historical level. It shapes the different forms of culture and allows bringing these together under one cultural denominator. The historically constant feature quoted before exists but does not give a reasonable

²⁶ Carpentier follows closely D'Ors' ideas on the baroque, and in his seminal essay "The Baroque and the Marvellous Real" argues that the baroque performs a creative drive and embodies a spirit rather than a historical style. He also considers the intricate vegetation of the American jungle and its tropical landscape as baroque elements (see his essays in *Obras Completas XIII. Ensayos*, México 1990). Carpentier specifically quotes D'Ors at crucial moments in his essay: "The Baroque must be understood, according to D'Ors – and I believe his theory on this is unquestionable – as a *human constant*" ("El barroquismo tiene que verse, de acuerdo con Eugenio D'Ors – y me parece que su teoría en esto es irrefutable –, como una *constante humana*"). See: "Lo Barroco y lo Real Maravilloso", in: *Obras Completas XIII. Ensayos*, 170.

²⁷ Eugenio D'Ors, *Lo Barroco*, Madrid 1993, 66.

account of the variety in cultural manifestations. In D'Ors' view, cultural forms are essentially modalities of a basic stylistic constant.

The "origin" of a culture is an abstract, universally valid type of feeling that brings people together according to their affects (feelings translated directly into forms). Along this line of thought, one can say that due to the universal nature of this stylistic constant, cultures turn out to be manifestations of the same general feeling defined by style, even though they emerge in a historically determined expression. D'Ors' formulation of the different "barroquismos" he encounters in Spanish culture from Gracián to Gaudí treat emotions and feelings in a collective way. In this theoretic explanation he goes so far as to say that the morphology of culture is closely related to a psychology of culture, in which form implies feeling, emotion and desire: "As graphology leads us to study, in relation to individual varieties, the individual states of the soul, the morphology of culture perceives and develops the stylistic translations of the collective spirit, of *Weltgeist* and its eons [...]. Each eon will have its telltale calligraphy".²⁸

In D'Ors' theorization a collective of feelings is thus synonymous with culture, and it can be abstracted and universalized into a trans-temporal style he calls "eon". D'Ors accounts for two opposite states of cultural styles, the Baroque and the Classical. These two "eons" are radically opposed to each other and clarify all possible local varieties – "the Classical style, all economy and reason, style of 'all the forms that weigh,' and the Baroque, all music and passion, where 'all the forms that fly' dance their dance".²⁹

In D'Ors' view, life does not manifest itself without form, without imitation and, especially, without reason. Here the Baroque comes centre stage. Nature, similar to life, emerges only as form. For example, sculptor José de Churriguera's column shows an analogy with a tree. Hence, nature obeys the types of culture and not vice versa. D'Ors claims that "The Baroque is the natural idiom of culture, whereby culture imitates the procedures of nature".³⁰ Just as pure life has disappeared from this world, nature has vanished and only appears as cultural reference. D'Ors shows that the 'original' models have vanished and cannot (should not) be brought back to purity. Culture, usually thought of as the outcome and goal of nature, has now obliterated nature and proliferates as a system of imitations.

²⁸ D'Ors, *Barroco*, 84-5.

²⁹ D'Ors, *Barroco*, 69.

³⁰ D'Ors, *Barroco*, 80.

For D'Ors "life" comes about in the culture of the Baroque, and this is because the Baroque mindset imitates "nature". Life, then, is already the product of an imitation and cannot make legitimate claims to provide a whole original experience. Life, thus, or rather the imitation of life in the Baroque, is an unnecessary desire to return to some sort of lost Eden. D'Ors' words imply that the return to an original state prior to the imitation of culture and the translation into forms is first of all not whole or "one". It induces fragmentation and is eventually impossible and self-destructive.

The Baroque, said to be natural, is therefore the limit of culture. The Baroque inclination towards the unruly side of nature, which would be a type of "uncultured nature", is in D'Ors' view a futile desire (which he terms "nostalgia"). Its persistence eventually leads to an individualist, often anarchic society that is threatened by dysfunctionality, by what he calls a "delirium of individuality".³¹ Moreover, in discussing the Baroque, D'Ors often uses terms related to mental illness and breakdown, as in "an illness proper to a most complex civilization, that of dying for the charms of innocence".³² He thus presents the Baroque as the limit of culture: yearning for a previous (and as mentioned, non-existent) "nature", its desires are unrealistic and threaten coherence, and finally, culture. That is, the individualist libido of the Baroque can never fulfill its desire since the lure of nature (and of innocence) is virtual and non-productive. Instead of imitating nature, D'Ors proposes contemplating the different manifestations of culture and bringing them into coherence.

In the work of Carpentier, the marvellous real resonates with echoes from the D'Orsian Baroque and from the symphonic organicism of Spengler. Carpentier was quite aware of the limits of his own critique of the Enlightenment and Western rationality, as he found in surrealism and in Spengler's vitalism the dangers of a fetishized conception of the irrational and the primitive. Decline or failure to attain goals – such as the futile efforts of the narrator of *Los Pasos Perdidos* – were the unavoidable side effects of modern society, which had lost the ability to believe in miracles and uphold faith over skepticism. Carpentier and the surrealists evoked the figure and the idea of the primitive to bridge the paradoxes of modernity found in the Spenglerian polarities of degeneration and vitalism, authenticity and self-reflection. As was the case with surrealism, Carpentier's conception of the marvellous hinged on the notion that the

³¹ D'Ors, *Barroco*, 55.

³² D'Ors, *Barroco*, 43.

'primitive' world transcends the initial division between the exterior and the interior world.

Roberto González Echevarría, in his brilliant study of Carpentier, proposes that the authors' final distance from surrealism came as a result of an attempt to resolve the contradictions between his own *Lebensphilosophie* and the universalizing tendencies of the European avant-garde.³³ While the surrealists may have shared his celebration of and search for the irrational and marvellous in the mundane world, this search led them on a journey within the individual psyche, and not towards an exploration that would extend the cultural values that produced the marvellous in the real world. The surrealist preference for self-exploration and introspection through automatic writing and the juxtaposition of ill-suited found objects to elicit a sense of shock, were to Carpentier mere parlour tricks. "The marvellous, obtained via conjuring tricks, bringing together objects that would never normally meet".³⁴ But more importantly such actions were a clear sign of European decadence and lack of vitality. Like Spengler and D'Ors, Carpentier also longed for that unreified and Romantic moment in which the "cosmic", the "*estados de alma*", and "*seelenhaftig*" expression of a people could be expressed through its history and in which the self-reflexive decline of a degenerate Faustian age could be celebrated, significantly, without taking recourse to essentialism.

³³ González Echevarría, *Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, 46.

³⁴ Carpentier, *Obras*, Vol. 2, 38.

Europa, Amerika in *transition* (1927-1938): Literatursprachliche Interkulturalität und Transgressionen des Avantgardesubjekts

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Für Christina O'Connor

Mit der dreisprachigen Literatur- und Kunstzeitschrift *transition* ist eines der einflußreichsten Medien der internationalen Avantgardebewegungen zu erschließen. Seit der Erstpublikation der Autobiographie ihres Herausgebers Eugène Jolas durch Andreas Kramer und Rainer Rumold¹ sind in neuerer Zeit in deutscher Sprache vor allem einige Aufsätze Klaus Kiefers erschienen. Sie zeigen, daß ihr Gegenstand komparatistische und interdisziplinäre Kompetenzen erfordert². Große monographische Forschungsarbeiten fehlen bislang allerdings. Zudem ist die Zeitschrift nicht leicht zugänglich, obwohl sämtliche Jahrgänge der Erscheinungsjahre 1927-1938 auch in Gestalt eines älteren Nachdrucks der Firma Kraus Reprint vorliegen. Die vielfach ihrer Erst- oder Neuedition harrenden Nachlaßschriften des Herausgebers von *transition* sind zugänglich in der Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library der Yale University, New Haven, und zwar als *Eugène and Maria Jolas Papers*. General Collection (GEN MSS 108)³.

Der dichterische, polylinguistische und übersetzungstheoretische Universalismus von Eugène und Maria Jolas wird im Rahmen der Veröffentlichung von Werken Becketts, Joyces, Kafkas und Gertrude Steins in sowie im Umkreis von *transition* herausgebildet. Beide Jolas übersetzen

¹ Eugène Jolas, *Man from Babel*, Andreas Kramer & Rainer Rumold (Hrsg.), New Haven-London 1998.

² Klaus H. Kiefer, „Krieg der Wörter? Eugène Jolas' Babel-Dichtung“, in: Klaus H. Kiefer, Armin Schäfer, Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa (Hrsg.), *Das Gedichtete behauptet sein Recht. Festschrift für Walter Gebhard zum 65. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Bern-Bruxelles u.a. 2001, 153-63; *idem*, „Eugène Jolas' multilinguale Poetik“, in: Manfred Schmeling, Monika Schmitz-Emans (Hrsg.), *Multilinguale Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg 2002, 121-35; *idem*, „Wortkunst' in Paris – Eugène Jolas und der deutsche Expressionismus“, in: Frank Krause (Hrsg.), *Frankreich und der deutsche Expressionismus/France and German Expressionism*, Göttingen 2008, 141-59.

³ <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke.JOLAS.nav.html> (Stand 07.05.2009).

1949 Hermann Brochs Studie *James Joyce und die Gegenwart* ins Englische⁴. Über die engeren literatursprachlichen Grenzen hinaus bestehen bei Eugène Jolas aufschlußreiche Verbindungen zur sogenannten „öffentlichen Meinungsforschung“ und zur „Propaganda“ im Kontext des „Office of War Information“ (OWI), also zum sogenannten „media agenda setting“⁵. Jolas, Joyce und Broch verbindet in diesem Kontext eine transatlantische Reflexionsplattform über die kommunikativen Möglichkeiten eines herkömmliche Erzählformen überwindenden Sprachmediums mit Blick auf ein Publikum, das sie in den Konventionen der Alltagssprache gefangen sehen. An den Schnittstellen zwischen Sprachexperiment und Sprachpolitik ist das in *transition* 16/17 (1929) entwickelte, sogenannte *Revolution of the Word Manifesto* besonders wichtig⁶. Es enthält eine anthropologische Grundlegung vergleichenden Sprachdenkens vor allem aus ethischen Bedürfnissen des ab den späten 1920er Jahren unter politischen Druck geratenen Kunstbewußtseins.

⁴ Hermann Broch, „James Joyce and the Present age“, in: *A James Joyce Yearbook*, Paris 1949, 68-108. Die im Archiv der Beinecke Library lagernden Entwürfe zum *James Joyce Yearbook* und die von Maria Jolas gesammelten archivalischen Materialien über Joyce verdienen daher unbedingt Aufmerksamkeit. Bedauerlicherweise hat die auf Hermann Broch spezialisierte Forschung *transition*, diesen bedeutenden Knotenpunkt transatlantischer Intellektuellennetzwerke während der Zeit des Exils, bislang nicht wahrgenommen. Und das, obwohl hier wichtige Erkenntnisse zu erwarten wären hinsichtlich der Entstehungsbedingungen von Brochs Hauptwerk *Der Tod des Vergil* (1936/37-1945), aber auch zum Verständnis der parallel hierzu entstehenden *Massenwahrnehmungstheorie*. Vgl. Thomas Borgard, „Planetarische Poetologie. Die symptomatische Bedeutung der Masse im amerikanischen Exilwerk Hermann Brochs“, in: Thomas Eicher, Paul Michael Lützel, Hartmut Steinecke (Hrsg.), *Hermann Broch. Politik, Menschenrechte – und Literatur?* Oberhausen 2005, 205-29 sowie die in Kürze erscheinende Monographie des Vfs.: *Hermann Brochs „Der Tod des Vergil“ – Sprachkunstwerk des 20. Jahrhunderts zwischen Zerfall und Überwindung*.

⁵ Dazu Everett M. Rogers, *A History of Communication Research. A Biographical Approach* [1994], New York 1997, 237-43. Über Jolas' Mitwirkung am OWI vgl. Jolas, *Man from Babel*, 192-6. Seine Tätigkeit ist zu reflektieren im Blick auf den für die Entwicklung der Sprachreflexion in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts bedeutsamen Übergang von einer narrativ ausgestalteten Kunstsprachlichkeit zu der an neuen technischen Medien (Radio, Film, Fernsehen) ausgerichteten Sprachpolitik. Den gedanklichen Horizont bestimmen hier Theorien der Regelung und Steuerung von ‚Information‘. Vgl. Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion. Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945-1960*, New York-Oxford 1994; Thymian Bussemer, *Propaganda. Konzepte und Theorien*, 2., überarb. Aufl., Wiesbaden 2008.

⁶ http://www.davidson.edu/academic/english/Little_Magazines/transition/big_manifesto.htm (Stand 07.05.2009).

Zur Zweideutigkeit des europäischen Avantgardebewußtseins nach 1920

Die Erscheinungsdaten der Zeitschrift *transition* (1927-1938) fallen sowohl in die spätere Zeit der produktiven Höhepunkte des europäischen Surrealismus, aber auch in die um 1930 bereits deutlich sichtbare Krisenphase der historischen Avantgarden. Ende der 1920er Jahre besteht offenbar ein Zusammenhang zwischen der in Deutschland von Musil, Thomas Mann, Döblin und Broch thematisierten, sogenannten „Romankrise“⁷ und einigen politischen Repragmatisierungsversuchen von Literatur. Diese können sowohl marxistisch-internationalistische sein als auch sich an Modellen religiöser⁸ oder nationalstaatlicher Erneuerung orientieren.

So entwickeln die Protagonisten der sogenannten *Querelle du réalisme* im Pariser Exil einen kritischen Blick auf den „formalen Hermetismus“ der Avantgarden: auf die von Louis Aragon beschriebene „monde fermé et incompréhensible“ z.B. des abstrakten französischen Kubismus. Wie der die künstlerische Montage als „Dekadenz“ verurteilende Georg Lukács fordert auch Aragon einen neuen Realismus. Gleichzeitig verwahren sich Brecht (allerdings mehr in der Theorie als dichtungspraktisch) und der Schriftsteller Jean Cassou gegen unbedachte Hochschätzungen leichter Verständlichkeit. Im Rahmen seiner „Dialektik der Verfremdung“ fordert Brecht: „Häufung der Unverständlichkeiten, bis Verständnis eintritt“. Und Ernst Bloch wirft Lukács vor, dieser setze „das Experiment des Zerfallens mit dem Zustand des Verfalls gleich“. Den Umfang dieser internationalen Debatte dokumentiert die Organisation einer internationalen Konferenz über Kunst und Realität bzw. Kunst und Staat, die 1934 unter der Schirmherrschaft des Völkerbundes in Venedig stattfindet⁹. Die letzten beiden Erscheinungsjahre der Zeitschrift *transition* fallen in die Jahre

⁷ Vgl. Helmuth Kiesel, *Geschichte der literarischen Moderne. Sprache, Ästhetik, Dichtung im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, München 2004, 315-20.

⁸ Dazu Thomas Borgard, „Hermann Brochs intellektuelle Entwicklung nach 1932. Religiöses Suchbild, Literatur und Gesellschaftslehre kultureller Ambivalenz“, in: *Recherches Germaniques. Revue annuelle. Hors série 5* (2008) [=Hermann Broch. *Religion, Mythos, Utopie – Zur ethischen Perspektive seines Werkes*, Paul Michael Lützeler, Christine Maillard (Hrsg.)], 135-64.

⁹ Vgl. dazu sowie zu den vorangehenden Zitaten Bettina Englmann, „Exil und Expressionismus – Kontinuitäten eines kunsttheoretischen Diskurses nach 1933“, in: Helga Schreckenberger (Hrsg.), *Ästhetiken des Exils*, Amsterdam-New York 2003, 37-54, hier 39ff. sowie die folgenden Quellenschriften: *La querelle du réalisme*, Paris 1936; Georg Lukács, „Es geht um den Realismus [1938]“, in: Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (Hrsg.), *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption*, Frankfurt am Main 1973, 192-230; Ernst Bloch, „Diskussionen über Expressionismus [1938]“, ebd., 180-91; *L'Art et la Réalité – L'Art et l'Etat*, Mario Alvera (Hrsg.), Paris 1935.

1936/1937, also in die Zeit der von Stalin angeordneten Pressekampagne gegen die als formalistisch verurteilte Musik Dmitrij Šostakovičs zugunsten einer auf Volkstümlichkeit aufbauenden Kunstdoktrin, verstanden als „Kanon der Verständlichkeit“¹⁰.

Zusammengefaßt läßt sich zu dieser historischen Entwicklung sagen:

(1.) Die bereits im Rahmen der ästhetischen Kultur der Jahrhundertwende um 1900 ausgebildete paradoxe Situation moderner Kunstprogrammatiken zwischen formalem Hermetismus und pragmatischem Anspruch verschärfte sich in Europa mit dem Auftritt radikaler politischer Massenbewegungen.

(2.) In Deutschland begannen während der Zeit der Weimarer Republik avantgardistische Erfahrungsinhalte in die Massenkultur einzudringen und zugleich technische Planungsmodelle die Arbeitswelt zu bestimmen, ein Vorgang, der als „Amerikanisierung“ beschrieben wurde¹¹. Kulturosoziologen wie Georg Simmel und Siegfried Kracauer beschrieben diesen Vorgang in eindringlichen Schriften. Kracaurs Gebrauch geometrischer und architektonischer Metaphern zur Schilderung des Lebens der „Masse“ registrierte diesen Wandel, in dessen Verlauf sich der Kulturbegriff mit allen möglichen Ausdrucksformen des alltäglichen Geschmacksausdrucks assoziierte¹². Und am Beispiel des Geldes zeigte Simmel wie der werthaft konnotierte Symbolisierungsvorgang eine intellektuell-abstrakte Beziehung zwischen Ausdrucksgestalt und repräsentiertem Inhalt herstellte; diese Beziehung war im wesentlichen eine formale und bewies damit ihre enge Verwandtschaft zu den formalästhetischen Kategoriebildungen¹³.

In beiden Fällen: in den totalitären Staaten und durch die Massenkultur, wurden Kollektive prämiert, deren Bindungen viele der an der Zeitschrift *transition* beteiligte Schriftsteller nicht als legitim anerkannten. Zwischen den militanten Dezisionismen des Faschismus sowie der in den Welten massenhaften Konsums von Waren und Bildern ausgebildeten

¹⁰ Vgl. Marco Frei, „Chaos statt Musik“. *Dimitri Šostakovič, die Pravda-Kampagne von 1936 bis 1938 und der Sozialistische Realismus*, Saarbrücken 2006, 76.

¹¹ Vgl. *Amerikanisierung. Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Alf Lütke, Inge Marbolek, Adelheid von Saldern (Hrsg.), Stuttgart 1996.

¹² Vgl. Siegfried Kracauer, „Das Ornament der Masse [1927]“, in: *Das Ornament der Masse. Essays*, Frankfurt am Main 1977, 50-63.

¹³ Vgl. Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* [1900], David P. Frisby, Klaus Christian Köhnke (Hrsg.), Frankfurt am Main 1989, 655ff.; Klaus Lichtblau, *Kulturkrise und Soziologie um die Jahrhundertwende. Zur Genealogie der Kulturosoziologie in Deutschland*, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 216f u. 219f.

konformistischen Passivität tat sich in ihren Augen eine Kluft auf. Einerseits galt die politisch mobilisierte Literatur als korruptiert, während andererseits der alternative Rückzug in die demobilisierte Innenorientierung einer Avantgarde den Bankrott erklärte, die durch Nonkonformität (politische) Veränderung zu bewirken glaubte. Denn man wurde in Europa gerade nicht zum Zeugen einer erfolgreichen Revolution durch Kunst, wie die Surrealisten hofften, sondern genau umgekehrt von Fällen, in denen sich politische Mächte die Kunst zueigen machten. Helmuth Kiesel's Aussagen hierzu sind instruktive Hinweise zu entnehmen:

Das avantgardistische Postulat der „Aufhebung“ der Differenz zwischen Kunst und Leben berührt die idealistisch-ästhetizistische Idee der Autonomie der Kunst, bedeutet aber nicht gleich deren Preisgabe. Im Gegenteil: Die frühen Avantgarden haben, indem sie die Kunst im Sinne von Nietzsches „*Artisten-Metaphysik*“ gleichsam zur Richtschnur des Lebens machten, den Autonomieanspruch der Kunst radikalisiert – und nur eben um eine praktische Dimension ergänzt. Dies war allerdings in zweifacher Hinsicht problematisch: Zum einen brachte die Avantgarde mit dieser Radikalisierung des Autonomieanspruchs die Kunst (und sich selber) nicht nur unter einen ungeheuren Leistungsdruck, sondern auch unter einen großen Legitimationsdruck; sie hatte nun auch darzutun, woraus ihr Führungsanspruch resultierte und worin die Überlegenheit ihrer Lebensentwürfe bestand. Zum andern ergaben sich aus dem Praxisbezug bald auch Ansprüche *an* die Kunst, die – am deutlichsten in der Phase der Politisierung um 1930 – zum Autonomieverlust führten, bestimmte Richtungen der Kunst unmöglich machten und für ihre Vertreter existenzgefährdend wurden.¹⁴

Die skizzierte doppelseitige Struktur beeinflusst in hohem Grade die Gesamtkonzeption der Zeitschrift *transition* und das sprachästhetische Programm ihres Herausgebers Jolas. Wie gesagt, es hat der historischen Situation entsprechend zwei Seiten. Diese werden erkennbar anhand der Gleichzeitigkeit dreier Projekte sowie im Bemühen um eine europäisch-amerikanische Kultursynthese. Da ist (1.) die Reflexion eines auf dem Faktum der Migration von Wörtern aufgrund der Migration von Menschen entstehenden ‚superokzidental‘ Erfahrungsraums; (2.) das Projekt eines atlantischen Wörterbuchs auf dem Weg zur synthetischen Universalsprache mit Namen *Atlantica*; (3.) der Plan für eine nicht-konventionelle, trilinguale Lyrik bzw. für ein sogenanntes *Migrant Epos* als Grundlage einer ebenso interlinguistischen wie nicht-kollektivistischen Sprache. Damit sollte auch ein weiteres Problem gelöst werden, nämlich der Konflikt zwischen „social language versus language as expression“;

¹⁴ Kiesel, *Geschichte der literarischen Moderne*, 247.

und Jolas fügt hinzu: „It was, in other words, the conflict between the Marxist and the romantic view of language“¹⁵.

Die prekäre Stellung des Avantgardesubjekts zwischen Polysemie und Technokratie

An dieser Stelle sind die Subjektkulturen genauer zu betrachten. Dabei ergibt sich erneut eine doppelwertige Struktur, woraus sich die Friktionen und Spannungen ableiten lassen, welche die europäischen Avantgardebewegungen instabil machen und sie nach und nach zur Auflösung drängen.

Wenn man die Moderne in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts insgesamt betrachtet, dann ergibt sich ein Bild komplexer Ambivalenz. Betrachtet man die Auflösung herkömmlicher Sozial- und Familienstrukturen, den Zerfall kirchlicher Autorität und die Negation traditioneller ästhetischer Normen, dann läßt sich auf der einen Seite von einer Ära der Befreiung des Subjekts von kollektiven Bindungen sprechen. Pluralismus, sexuelle Promiskuität und individuelle Wahlfreiheit des Konsumenten sind Stichworte, mit denen ein spezifisches Eigeninteresse dieser Subjekte benannt wird, und zwar in Verbindung mit der Expressivität des Körpers, den Inszenierungen des Selbst durch den Gebrauch der Mode sowie einer nonkonformistisch neue Bereiche des Sprach- und Bildausdrucks entdeckenden Kunst¹⁶. Auf der anderen Seite erscheint dasselbe Subjekt den Mechanismen einer ausufernden Bürokratie unterworfen, als Sklave maschineller Arbeitsprozesse sowie als Gegenstand und Opfer politischer Massenbewegungen. Aber auch im Rahmen ökonomischer Prozesse, wie sie sich in der Weimarer Republik und der noch jungen amerikanischen Massendemokratie herausbilden, erscheint dieses Subjekt normalisiert und kontrolliert, nämlich durch technische Funktionalität und arbeitsförmige Soziabilität¹⁷. Die Struktur zeigt also gleichzeitig Merkmale sowohl der Individualisierung als auch der Vermassung, sowohl der Freiheit als auch der sachlichen Disziplinierung

¹⁵ Jolas, *Man from Babel*, 110.

¹⁶ Vgl. Georg Simmel, „Die Mode“ [1911], in: *Philosophische Kultur*, 2. Aufl., Leipzig 1919, 25-57. Den Gegensatz des künstlerisch-sinnlichen Gesichtspunkts zum sozialetischen hebt der für Analysen der Mode und des Luxuskonsums zuständige Werner Sombart hervor, wenn er im Anschluß an Simmels *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) die ältere „ethische Nationalökonomie“ durch eine „ästhetische Nationalökonomie“ ersetzen möchte. Vgl. Werner Sombart, *Der moderne Kapitalismus*, Leipzig 1902, Bd.1, XXX.

¹⁷ Vgl. die Studie von Andreas Reckwitz, *Das hybride Subjekt. Eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne*, Weilerswist 2006.

bzw. der Kontrolle, wie der Soziologe Alfred Vierkandt schreibt: „Der Kapitalismus schafft [...] einerseits die moderne Arbeit, die Arbeit im strengen Sinne als bloßes Mittel mit ihrem Krampf der Spannung (Askese), andererseits den Zustand der Ruhe als bloße Entspannung mit dem bloßen Ziel der Lust [...]“¹⁸. Die Existenz dieses Zusammenhangs registrieren auch Kracaurs Kino-Studien für das Berlin der 1920er Jahre, und zwar im Zuge der neu entstandenen Angestelltenschicht:

größer und fühlbarer ist [d.i. in der Weltstadt Berlin im Vergleich zur Provinz; T.B.] die Anspannung der arbeitenden Massen – eine wesentlich formale Anspannung, die den Tag ausfüllt, ohne ihn zu füllen. Das Versäumte soll nachgeholt werden; es kann nur in der gleichen Oberflächensphäre erfragt werden, in der man aus Zwang sich versäumt hat. Der Form des Betriebs entspricht mit Notwendigkeit die des „Betriebs“. Ein richtiger Instinkt sorgt dafür, daß das Bedürfnis nach ihm befriedigt werde. Jene Zurüstungen der Lichtspielhäuser bezwecken das eine nur: das Publikum an die Peripherie zu fesseln, damit es nicht ins Bodenlose versinke. Die Erregungen der Sinne folgen sich in ihnen so dicht, daß nicht das schmalste Nachdenken sich zwischen sie einzwängen kann.¹⁹

Von besonderem Interesse ist die Tatsache, daß die historisch-soziologische Komponente des Problems ein exaktes Pendant im Feld der Literatur- und Kunstgeschichte hat. Dies ist zu erläutern am Beispiel des Unterschieds zwischen Dadaismus, Surrealismus und Futurismus. Dem in surrealistischen Manifesten eröffneten Zugang zu den von gesellschaftlichen Institutionen unterdrückten emotionalen Tiefenschichten des Bewußtseins²⁰ steht der Kult der Zivilisationsleistung der Maschine gegenüber, wie ihn die Futuristen praktizieren. Und die ästhetisch-erotisch-spielerische Feier des Erlebens und Auslebens in Surrealismus und Dadaismus findet wiederum ihren Kontrast im Verlust des individuellen Lebensgefühls, wie ihn Kafka, Broch und Canetti in ihren literarischen Werken thematisieren. Man hat es also, was die Erscheinungsweisen der europäischen Avantgarden zwischen ca. 1890 und 1940 betrifft, nicht nur

¹⁸ Alfred Vierkandt, „Kultur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und der Gegenwart“, in: Alfred Vierkandt (Hrsg.), *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie*, Stuttgart 1931, 141-60, Zitat 147.

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, „Kult der Zerstreuung. Über die Berliner Lichtspielhäuser“ [1926], in: *Das Ornament der Masse*, 311-317, Zitat 313f.

²⁰ Wenn die Surrealisten die traumhaft-assoziativen und alogischen Dimensionen des Erlebnisses hervorheben, mehrten sich die künstlerischen Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten. Entsprechend registriert Broch bei Joyce eine „hypertrophische Über-Ausdrucksfähigkeit“. Vgl. Hermann Broch, „James Joyce und die Gegenwart. Rede zu Joyces 50. Geburtstag“ [1936], in: Paul Michael Lützeler (Hrsg.), *Hermann Broch, Kommentierte Werkausgabe*, Bd.9/1, Frankfurt am Main 1975, 63-94, hier 68.

mit einer Form des Kulturausdrucks zwischen Kollektivismus und Individualismus zu tun; sondern in sie eingebettet ist auch eine doppel-seitige Geschichte transformierter Subjektivität.

Man könnte nun wie folgt formulieren: Während der Technikkult des Futurismus das Subjekt analog zum *social engineering* der maschinisierten und bürokratisierten Arbeitswelt gegen Kontingenz abschließt, öffnen es die Bedeutungsspiele des Surrealismus derselben Kontingenz. Damit setzen die gesellschaftlichen und die literarisch-künstlerischen Kräfte das (Künstler-)Subjekt auf mehrfache Weise unter Druck. So ist die in modernen Lagen zwischen „Ordnungswut und Destruktionslust“²¹ aufbrechende Kluft das zentrale Thema von Döblins Roman *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929)²². Was alle Avantgarde-Richtungen miteinander verbindet, ist ihre Gegnerschaft zu den bürgerlichen Denk- und Lebensweisen, dargelegt in einer kaum überschaubaren Menge von Programmschriften. Revolte und Verstörung werden hier als probate Mittel der Ablehnung von Bürgerlichem gesehen.

Eine besondere Methode antibürgerlicher Kritik ist die den neuen städtischen Erfahrungen, ihren Verkehrsformen, aber auch den akustischen und visuellen Medien entsprechende Darstellung subjektiver Reizmomente. Diese Reize werden nicht mehr durch ein sittlich-moralisches Ordnungsschema gebremst, sondern in ihrer eigendynamischen Vieldeutigkeit gesteigert. Vor diesem Hintergrund scheint sich in der modernen Welt des 20. Jahrhunderts das fließende Raum-Zeit-Gefüge zum Paradox einer „zeitlosen Zeit“, ja der „Vernichtung von Raum und Zeit“²³ zu verdichten. Diese Erfahrung setzt Auflösungs-, Zerdehnungs- und Verflüchtigungsmomente frei. Somit wird Subjektivität nicht nur in ihren Erfahrungswerten verändert, literarisch repräsentiert durch die ‚stream of consciousness‘-Technik, sondern auch gleichsam selbst aufgelöst: in den Zusammenhängen des Kontingenten, Artifiziiellen sowie multipler Identitäten. Dabei kommt es bezogen auf die Einstellung zur Sprache zu einer besonderen Spannung, denn die Werke der Avantgarden zeichnet eine bewußt komponierte Vieldeutigkeit aus; und sie bedeutet immer auch die Abstraktion von leichter Verstehbarkeit.

²¹ Kiesel, *Geschichte der literarischen Moderne*, 340.

²² Vgl. Thomas Borgard, „Alfred Döblins literarische Produktion der 1920er Jahre im Rahmen des soziologischen Theorie- und Wissenswandels“, in: Sabina Becker, Robert Krause (Hrsg.), *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik. Reihe A. Kongreßberichte*, Bd. 95, 2008, 125-48.

²³ Vgl. Rosa Hartmut, *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstruktur in der Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, 344f.

Für die dichterischen Werke von Jolas läßt sich daher folgendes grundsätzlich feststellen: seine experimentelle Lyrik akzentuiert eine doppelte Abwehrhaltung sowohl gegen den Konformismus des Trivialkonsums als auch gegen die politisch-ideologisch funktionalisierte Massenästhetik. Zudem bildet seine Orientierung an der deutschen romantischen Literatur ein Gegenstück zur Haltung außenorientierter Sachlichkeit, mit der Max Weber dem „Leiden eines Liberalen an der Bürokratie“ nachgibt. Wenn Weber klagt: „Wie ist es angesichts dieser Übermacht der Tendenz zur Bürokratisierung überhaupt noch möglich, irgend welche Reste einer in irgendeinem Sinn ‚individualistischen‘ Bewegungsfreiheit zu retten?“²⁴, dann verweist Jolas diese Frage offenbar an das Laboratorium der Dichtung. Denn Polysemie in Verbindung mit der Autonomisierung der Form, d.h. des Sprachklangs und des Rhythmus, ist für Jolas ein probates Mittel, um zwei Momente hervorzuheben: (1.) eine erhöhte Sensibilität für die von spezifischen Inhalten und Gebrauchswerten unabhängigen Formwerte und (2.) den Anspruch auf eine jetzt allerdings nicht mehr europäische, sondern weltkulturelle Gemeinschaftsbildung.

Indes blieb kritisch zu fragen: wo war anzusetzen, wenn der Anspruch auf formale Perfektionierung und der gegen die Konvention gerichtete, experimentell erzielte Bedeutungsüberschuß die kommunikativen Möglichkeiten von Literatur nicht festigte, sondern auflöste? Das Problem ist ein Paradox der gesamten modernen Kunstproduktion, das sich unter den Bedingungen der politischen Radikalisierung in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren nochmals verschärft. Denn, wie gesagt, Kommunismus, Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus entwickeln jeweils auf ihre Weise eine politische Ästhetik der Kollektivität²⁵, während sich bestimmte Merkmale avantgardistischer Text- und Bildproduktion in der kommerziellen Populärkultur wiederfinden.

Eugène Jolas' transatlantischer Bewältigungsversuch der ‚Malady of Language‘

An dieser prekären Stelle kunstprogrammatischer Reflexion zwischen Bedeutungsspiel und Technik, Elitismus und Massenkultur bzw. Macht-

²⁴ Zit. nach Reinhard Blomert, *Intellektuelle im Aufbruch. Karl Mannheim, Alfred Weber, Norbert Elias und die Heidelberger Sozialwissenschaften der Zwischenkriegszeit*, München-Wien 1999, 61.

²⁵ Vgl. Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation. Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen 1971; *Faschismus und Avantgarde*, Reinhold Grimm, Jost Hermand (Hrsg.), Königstein-Ts. 1980; Markus Bernauer, *Die Ästhetik der Masse*, Basel 1990.

politik wird im Jahr 1927 die Avantgarde-Zeitschrift *transition* gegründet. Sie erscheint in elf Jahrgängen bis 1938 gleichzeitig in New York, London, Paris und Den Haag. In ihr werden u.a. publiziert: Kafkas Erzählungen *Das Urteil* und *Die Verwandlung*, frühe Texte Becketts sowie Joyces *Work in Progress*, also die Vorstufen zu *Finnegans Wake*.

Multinationalität und Multilingualität waren von Anfang an in das Programm des Herausgebers Eugène Jolas, geboren in New Jersey, Sohn einer deutschen Mutter und eines französischen Vaters, integriert. In dem von 16 Autoren unterzeichneten, 1929 in *transition* publizierten *Revolution of the Word manifesto* heißt es lapidar: „The writer expresses, he does not communicate“. Gleichwohl war es die Hauptabsicht der Zeitschrift, ein internationales Avantgarde-Netzwerk aus Schriftstellern, Bildenden Künstlern und Übersetzern zu begründen, einen „workshop of the intercontinental spirit“²⁶. In diesem Zusammenhang wurden die formalen Probleme diskutiert, deren Lösungen literaturwissenschaftliche und linguistische Methoden erforderten. Der aus dem Formbewußtsein hervorgehende stilistische Perfektionsdrang ließ sich im Anschluß an die von Jolas Mitte der 1930er Jahre in *transition* 23 entfachte Diskussion der „Mutation in Language“ bzw. der „Malady of Language“²⁷ mit der Frage verknüpfen, ob sprachliche Neuschöpfungen (wie sie Hans Arp, Hugo Ball, Jolas und Joyce vorlegten) der Aufklärung und damit dem ethischen Engagement dienten oder nur zurück in den Ästhetizismus führten? Und was die Situation zusätzlich erschwerte: in einer Welt ohne einheitliches Wertzentrum existierten keine verlässlichen Kriterien mehr, um zwischen akzeptablen und inakzeptablen Vorstellungen zu unterscheiden.

Bemerkenswert ist eine im Nachlaßarchiv der Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library befindliche autobiographischen Skizze. In ihr schreibt Jolas über die Schwierigkeit, der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit in ethisch reformierender Absicht auf dem Weg der Destruktion sprachlicher Konventionen zu begegnen:

Throughout the war I kept the vision of a universal language before me. I worked on a global dictionary. [...] I had come back to the bilingual genesis of my universe, but it only intensified the malaise, and I often thought of Babel, the millennial curse. And yet I knew that Germany was a great proving ground for a

²⁶ Vgl. Eugène Jolas, *Transition workshop*, New York 1949, 13.

²⁷ Vgl. Dougald McMillan, *transition. The History of a Literary Era 1927-1938*, London 1975, 68f. u. 269 sowie im Ursprungskontext den aufschlußreichen Aufsatz von Carola Giedion-Welcker, „Die Funktion der Sprache in der heutigen Dichtung“, in: *transition*, 22, 1933, 90-100; wiederabgedruckt in: Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Schriften 1926-1971. Stationen zu einem Zeitbild*, Reinhold Hohl (Hrsg.), Köln 1973, 208-18.

future language. English, French, German are being intermingled in this Occidental part of Germany [...]. I thought with a certain melancholy of the days before the war when we felt this problem intensely. We were a handful of newspapermen and poets who sensed the pathology perhaps more than others, who passed through the experience of diverse tongues, who found a progressive sclerosis in all of them. Some of us tried radical solutions, we created a poetic and prose medium in which words were invented, in which we posited a miraculous philology. We were interested in inter-linguistic experiments and tried to get go back to the primitive etymons. But we found nothing but chaos, barbarism and death.²⁸

Zwei Optionen standen Jolas zur Verfügung. Die erste war die Erschaffung einer synthetischen Universalsprache, *Atlantica*, mit deren Hilfe die europäische Kultur in eine Weltkultur umgeformt werden sollte²⁹. Literarisch dokumentiert wird diese Absicht durch Jolas' bemerkenswerte trilinguale Lyrikproduktion, so etwa das Gedicht *Silvalogue*:

Silvalogue

I.

In funkling stemwhorl mutes the postnoon dripling
grou. Loney I slike over stilettoes of pine. The loobatinkala
glucks soft. Oaks mauk under the shlifknives of the fallers.
A grayard moods before a flame rooling the huss-hiss of charring.
Beeses bly through gelb-leaves.

II.

Voices moom and bleer. Sometimes icebirds clonk by
and silver into a parallelograph. The zwigs of the birks flut-
flitter white. A paramyth sheams rosarosily in moss. The
champirooms hide zwergs and nixes dancing to the float-fiddles
of a singering.

III.

Swoosh fallows. Cruxroad whites nude. I am on whuffled
pads. The bruting postnoon bloots humility of pineal gloot.
But always I go seeching, fright with the drug of the evendplanet,
in the oorworld of the glishglash mirror, an hour hooling heresiarchs.

²⁸ Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Signatur: GEN MSS 108, Box 140.

²⁹ Vgl. Jolas, *Man from Babel*, XVII: „Why should language not be channeled into a universal idiom? Seven years ago I called this potential tongue *Atlantica*, because I felt that it might bridge the continents and neutralize the curse of Babel“.

IV.

Flingflang! And yet from far off moods a folkhymn in silver
 Vocarillions of graces. There is a twinkle of fragile leeb, and
 the hallali of stalkers, and the world sinks into my hands
 with a clingaling of greeblou astars.³⁰

Die zweite Möglichkeit entwickelte Jolas anhand einer gedanklichen Operation, die er „Transformation of European into American“ nannte. Darin wird sein Wunsch verwirklicht, die im Sprachklang und -duktus des Deutschen als tröstend empfundenen individualisierenden Aspekte der alteuropäischen Kultur zu erhalten und gegen die Kollektivismen des 20. Jahrhunderts zu wenden. Verwiesen wird dabei auf Achim von Arnims 1808 herausgegebene und 1924 nachgedruckte Textsammlung *Tröst Einsamkeit, alte und neue Sagen und Wahrsagungen, Geschichten und Gedichte* sowie auf Novalis. Jolas bekennt:

I often fled into its past. I pored over dusty old volumes and brochures and delighted in the romantic poetry [...]. There I discovered one day the story of “Trosteinsamkeit” which the poet Achim von Arnim used a hundred years before as the motto for his “Magazine for Hermits”, and as I contemplated the word “Trost” – consolation or comfort – I saw in it a quality which I sensed was part of the virtues of the old German language.³¹

Im Anschluß daran gibt der Autor ein Beispiel seines hybriden Schreibens:

In this state of mind I wrote poems in German in which I tried to go back to the vanished sounds as in the following: Wenn ich an New York denke am abend und die Lampe glueht, wandelt sich die grosse Ruine langsam wie ein Traum. Die Stille der Angst wird ein seltsam heiseres Schrilla von Stahl. Ungeheuer kreist das Totenlied [...]. Wir stehen auf den flachen Daechern und gruessen die Betelgeuse. Wir sind umweht von schimmernden Worten. Wir wollen fliegen in den grossen Raum, wo metallene Engel musikkirrend Gesaenge der schoenen Zukunft singen.³²

Man bedenke erneut, wogegen sich dieser Sprachstil vornehmlich richtet:

There was a displacement of languages in Europe of the totalitarians. The migrations had had their repercussions in a linguistic disequilibrium since the nazi and communist forces started their drives against humanity. It became obvious to

³⁰ Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 108, Box 17/316.

³¹ Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 108, Box 140.

³² Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 108, Box 140.

me that both German and French were in regression. They were developing into regionalistic expressions. I saw still the pentacostal beauty and opulence of French, a festive éclat which is the projection of ancient celtic villages, of gardens full of fruit trees and wall-in by grey stone walls, of lonely mysterious forests of oak and fir trees. It was still the earth of my ancestors in Lorraine as German was that of my Rhenish ancestors.³³

Die unkonventionelle Gestalt des Sprachkunstwerks entzieht sich nicht nur symbolisch den Kontrollinstanzen des europäischen Totalitarismus, sondern auch der Alltagssprache und ihrer massenhaften Reproduktion durch die moderne Unterhaltungsindustrie. Auch für den im amerikanischen Exil mit dem massendemokratischen Medienwandel konfrontierten Adorno gilt schließlich das Paradox: „Kommunikation der Kunstwerke [...] durch Nichtkommunikation“³⁴. Implizit oder explizit geäußerte Themen Adornos sind die „Verstaatlichung“ der Literatur im sozialistischen Realismus mit ihrer „Unterdrückung der Expressivität“ zugunsten einer „unpersönlichen“ Stilistik³⁵ und die kommerziellen Funktionalisierungen der Kunst zu einem „culinary product“, wie sie Adornos Memorandum *Music in Radio* beklagt³⁶.

Wie gesehen, wird das Gleichgewicht avantgardistischer Kunstprojekte auch durch ihre inneren Voraussetzungen gestört, und zwar dort, wo sich die Perspektive von der hohen artistischen Qualität der Kunstwerke über ihren ethischen Reformanspruch zur ästhetisierten Lebenspraxis verschiebt. Bewußt zum Zweck der Sublimierung eingesetzt, bleibt der moderne Kunstgenuß dem von Weber explizierten abendländischen Rationalisierungsprozeß indirekt verbunden. Erst dadurch können sich die unter dem Begriff der Kunstautonomie zusammengefaßten Intellektualismen und formalästhetischen Innovationen herausbilden, denen im Zeichen veränderter Lebensgewohnheiten zugleich Programme zur Entdifferenzierung von Kunst und Alltag, Hohem und Niederm, Reflektiertem und Naivem entgegeng gehalten werden. Vor dieser Folie stellt das

³³ Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, GEN MSS 108, Box 140.

³⁴ Zu Adornos *Ästhetischer Theorie* vgl. Peter V. Zima, *Kritik der Literatursoziologie*, Frankfurt am Main 1978, 185f. sowie das dort gegebene Adorno-Zitat: „Denn Kommunikation ist die Anpassung des Geistes an das Nützliche, durch welche er sich unter die Waren einreicht“.

³⁵ Berühmt-berüchtigt ist in diesem Kontext eine Äußerung des Sozialdemokraten, und späteren Anhängers der Oppositionsbewegung um Leo Trotzki, Karl Radek. Demnach sei das Werk von Joyce ein „von Würmern wimmelnder Misthaufen, mit einer Filmkamera durch ein Mikroskop aufgenommen“. Vgl. Hans Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur. Entstehung und Funktionsweise des sozialistisch-realistischen Kanons in der sowjetischen Literatur der 30er Jahre*, Stuttgart 1984, 65ff. u. 70f.

³⁶ Vgl. Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno. Eine Biographie*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, 380.

subversiv-eklektizistische Selbstverständnis der Zeitschrift *transition* bis 1938 nicht nur eines der fruchtbarsten Diagnoseinstrumente der internationalen Avantgarden dar, sondern ihr Ende dokumentiert auch die Auflösung der Ursprungskonstellation: nicht zuletzt im Übergang zur zweiten Jahrhunderthälfte zwischen ‚unvollendeter Moderne‘ und ‚Postmoderne‘.

Travels of an Avant-Gardist, West-East-West: On Kawara

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From the Church Father to the Mystic of the Motor-Car

St Augustine was a man ahead of his contemporaries. As such, Augustine exists twice: firstly as the canonised Church Father, and, secondly, as an early modern subject. Augustine's modernity is due to the radical way in which he experienced time, in especial the split in and of time. Whereas he was programmatically more or less a traditional theorist of memory, who interpreted memory as a static space, a storage room, as a library,¹ he became a theorist of time who got entangled in a web of paradoxes. He felt uncomfortable and uncanny with the sudden closeness of his own youth, for instance. The child and the young man he had been were near and far away at once. The split in time went hand in hand with a break in his identity. It produced a feeling of unreality. He found it hard to imagine that he had once been this young human being. And that the converted Christian Augustine lived in another symbolic order than the young Gnostic and successful classical rhetorician he had been years ago, only intensified the distance in time.

The 11th book of Augustine's *Confessions* is justly famous. Here, the Church Father formulated all the experiences that later became fundamental in modernist thought, literature and the arts. The split of time produces a lot of paradoxes, among other things that we seem to know what time is, as long as we do not contemplate it. The being of time can be characterised by the postulate that time is *not*. Time responds to the *classical* philosophical question about its existence ambiguously. Its being is defined by the fact that it denies its existence. We are never really just in time. The present is never present and available. And when it is presented,

¹ Aurelius Augustinus, *Confessiones/Bekenntnisse*, Zweisprachige Ausgabe, aus dem Lateinischen von Joseph Bernhart, Frankfurt am Main [397/398]1987, 505ff. Compare: Frances Yates, *Gedächtnis und Erinnern. Mnemonik von Aristoteles bis Shakespeare*, Weinheim [1966]1990, 48-51.

it is no more present. The past, however, is *not*, because it is no more present, but the result of a construction of a present that is fleeting. For Augustine, time dissolves itself in an unstable, fluid state of recollecting, presenting and foreseeing. To experience the present, however, we always come too late.²

The unchangeable dynamic of difference as Augustine described it became central for Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1926) and, later too, for Derrida's concept of *différance*.³ Modernist art too can be seen as a heroic attempt to bridge the split of time. In literature and the arts, what is impossible in life, seems possible: to generate an accord between the event and the act of presence and presentation. It becomes the decisive intention of many modernist artists to fix this impossible moment and bridge the existential abyss of time. This moment, which proves to be an act of spontaneity in the *Lebenswelt*, in which time is experienced as a moment, lies, for example, very much at the core of Ulrich's desire, Musil's hero in the *Man without Qualities*, to grasp the mysticism of a motor-car as it was present in futurism's programmatic obsession with time. Here, speed was not only mimetically captured in pictures. In the acceleration the split of time also seemed to have been minimised in a way that made the epiphany of the moment possible. Kandinsky's abstract brushstroke, too, represented this experience of a *now*, which seemed to be without a beginning, a radical presence, in which the split of time seems to be suspended.

Similarly, the overthrow of traditional patterns of storytelling in modernist literature can be related to artists' work on the split of time. That overthrow tied in with a deeply felt longing for being just in time. It announced the experiment of running and moving around the whole day with a video-camera that records everything; the contingent issues in pure presence or the novel in real-time make possible what is impossible in real life: to fix the inner stream of un/consciousness in an act of automatic writing. James Joyce was obsessed by this idea, as were the French surrealists. Their streams of un/consciousness and automatic writing nestled against the continuity of time. In a process of depicting and presenting a dynamic, mimetic act, the stream generated the design of modern subjectivity and provided it with evidence. It left behind the old-fashioned, unhurried construction of time in traditional narratives wherein

² Augustinus, *Confessiones*, 601-71. Compare: Richard Corradini, *Zeit und Text. Studien zum tempus-Begriff des Augustinus*, Wien 1997; and Paul Ricœur, *Zeit und Erzählung*, Band 1: *Zeit und historische Erzählung*. Aus dem Französischen von Rainer Rochlitz, München 1988, 15-53.

³ Jacques Derrida, „Freud und der Schauplatz der Schrift“, in: *Die Schrift und die Differenz*. Aus dem Französischen von Rodolphe Gasché und Ulrich Köppen, Frankfurt am Main 1972[1967], 302-50, here 311.

the story of life starts from a hidden retrospective time of storytelling and ends in the harbour of a happy end in which the hero finds his or her identity. In so doing, modernist literature also parted ways with Augustine.

The linear and retrospective concept of organising time and identity had provided St Augustine with the solution to his problem of integrating the irritating past. He embedded the irritating experience of discontinuity in time and person into a calming narrative, which dissolved the disturbances of his life: a story of misdemeanour and transgression, error and conversion and growing religious education. The single moments were connected like the elements of a chain. Retrospectively, time thus emerged as calming and continuous. With it came a teleology that connected the single episodes of life in the whole of life. This is a traditional aspect of Augustine's writing. His self-description, based on making a difference between the time of events and the time of storytelling, then became a prototype of identity-construction, which would not be possible without the idea of a duration of time constructed by a traditional narrative. Rousseau's *Confessions* might well be in contrast to Augustine's, inasmuch as Rousseau favoured the idea of an essentially innocent childhood and human nature over the concept of original sin. Augustine had dissolved and confirmed the alienation between the adult storyteller and his being as a child in his life story, when he had insisted that the crying egotistic brat he once was had always already lived under the curse of original sin. In this respect, Rousseau was the Anti-Augustine. In his autobiographical narrative, innocent childhood proved to be the vanishing point of his critique of society. However, the matrix of his narrative with its linear structure of leitmotif – teleology and progress – had not changed. In the end, the truth was still revealed: the truth about the individual in the sense of an Aristotelian *entelechia*, with an inner kernel that had been dormant in it, coming to the fore only against the repressive structure of society.

This mode of symbolic self-assurance was denied in the modernist arts. Partly, their pathos had to do with the programmatic belief that it was impossible to mend the split of time by using a retrospective concept of continuity and linearity. What they created instead was evidence: I feel myself just in this moment, so I am, fragmented, created by the moment. The dissolving of continuity in time and the deconstruction of a substantial subject were two sides of the same coin. This was the message of Mach and Bergson, the most famous philosophers besides Nietzsche at the end of the 19th century – their message is hopelessly lost, because the traditional narrative construction of time has been cancelled, although Nietzsche's critique of the historical human being and his praise of the timeless moment of course had anticipated it.

As the modernist fine arts dissolved the Euclidean space, the literature of the avant-garde destroyed the continuity of time and the classical strategies of storytelling. Nevertheless, this work of dissolution and emancipation from tradition remained linked with a continuing aesthetic desire to overcome the abyss between life and the arts. This, of course, had already been the pivotal point in early German Romanticism. The fascination with life and the *élan vital* had to do with the aim of suspending the split in time in modern aesthetic experience, in the act of production as well as perception. The aim was a form of presence, which was radically absent-minded and in which the present did not become part of a present recalling and recollecting. A state of forgetting the present and/or the past, until presence alone remained.

Something similar happened, when the present totally disappeared and was eclipsed by an obsession of recollecting. As one can show in Proust and Benjamin, the construction of time in modernism also changed with regard to the act of remembering. In their work we no longer encounter the calm, relaxed and confident retrospective from a fixed position, in which the distance between past and present remains clear and dominant. Instead, recollecting here becomes radically subjective, an effect of the desire to recall the past radically. The difference in time disappears in the act of recalling the past into presence, and every other dimension of time disappears. What is recollected, is to be immediately and authentically present: in this moment, *now*. The theatre of the past is *broadcasted* as if it were live: as an event in the now. (This is the profane side of modern mysticism.)

Marcel Proust's *magnum opus* is not only a search for time lost, a gigantic symbolic machinery of remembrance, but also a text which heads for presence. It starts with a radical recollection of a childhood that becomes present as a result of a "tiger-jump" (Benjamin). It represents a form of recollecting that does not primarily refer to events and episodes but to the construction and the emotional background of those events and episodes. The present, lost time is constructed in a way that aims to evoke the subjective experience of the past in the here and now, by the smell of the madeleine at the aunt's, in the pain to be sent to bed without mother's goodnight kiss, in the iconography of the church, the journey during the summer holidays, and so on. This attempt to remember the past presupposes a forgetting of the present as well as of the time of storytelling. To imagine oneself as a child, it is necessary to forget that one is an adult. In addition, this construction requires the horizon of being an adult, because childhood, simultaneously, is but a construction of adults. Benjamin, for example, excessively used the constructed glance of the astonished child that still feels that the world is strange, and this not only in recollections of

his own childhood in Berlin around 1900 – from the Anhalt railway station (whose name the young Benjamin associated with *anhalten*, to stop) to the ornaments of the fin de siècle – but also in his famous, unfinished *Passagenwerk*. The glance of the child is the simulated perspective of a secondary observer who is unfamiliar with the self-evidence of a culture created by grown-ups. Benjamin thus tried to deny a procedure Theodor Lessing, a philosopher of German expressionism, had called the “sense-making of the senseless”, the transformation of previous events by the following. The smell of cookies in Proust or the scent of a mother’s womb in Musil’s early novel *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) have no meaning in a strong and determining sense: both are to some extent contingent and at once formative because of their emotional density. When the time of recollecting and the perspective of the adult (which is linked to it) are deleted, literature is no longer obliged to construct a fixed identity and meaning, and can only refer to the pathos of present(ed) experiences, which becomes the only grounds for making modern existence (self-)evident. Contingency and surplus of meaning, thus, were implied and intended. To live truly meant to display a systematic distrust of the idea and attempt to cover up the split of time, as was done in traditional narrative constructions. Yet at the same time, one could only carry on writing and storytelling. Looking at the West with a non-occidental background, post-1945 Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara was soon to show that there were still other, far more radical ways to reflect on “modern” time.

Diarizing and Empty Homogenous Time, or the Monks from St Gall and a post-World War Two Japanese Artist

Jonathan Watkins, in his books about On Kawara, remarks that the “production of a Date Painting is a diarizing activity”.⁴ Kawara’s work, then, can be understood as a kind of a diary, the diary of a painter, a diary consisting of paintings and montages. But it is not a diary of a painter who paints and writes a diary, perhaps, as a commentary on his oeuvre. Instead his oeuvre itself is the diary, with the so-called *Date paintings* (literally, paintings depicting dates, see figure 32), and similar works and series on the axis of time: registrations of getting up, registers of persons, daily telegrams. The result is a sort of ego-document with a very specific and unique experimental background. It is a subjective, personal and intimate

⁴ Jonathan Watkins, *On Kawara*, New York-London 2002, 54.

manifestation which voices – this is at least the rough idea – the artist’s utopia of living in the presence of time. A diary contains a number of entries (reflections, reports, observations) that might be interesting to remember in the future. It establishes a symbolic realm for a later time. At the same time it marks the artist’s *own* time, which is not posterior, from a later point of view. There is pathos in the objective documentation of life, in the concept of a diarizing activity, although it is – against the phantasm of the total documentation of one’s life – impossible to depict all aspects of one’s *real* lives in the way Joyce’s novel depicts the internal life of Leopold Bloom during 24 hours. One always selects events, public and private. Lichtenberg did so in his *Sudelbüchern*, as did Bert Brecht in his working journal (where he also integrated journalistic material). So does On Kawara in his *Date paintings*. In addition, one cannot influence how the synchronic entry of a specific day will be recollected afterwards. When we look at Kawara’s *Date painting* from the 28th of December 1972, created while he was staying in Sweden, the painting (that is, the interpretative avenues and approaches available today) has irrevocably changed because of a time gap of thirty years. When Kawara made his entries about the war in Vietnam or about the flight to the moon (lunar mission), he did so against a contemporary horizon or narrative matrix, from a synchronous perspective. Today, however, three decades on, we may well link them to our own situation (the war in Iraq, the missions to Mars, ...). It is the entry of the date that makes it possible afterwards to recollect not only the events – an everyday spaghetti-meal with the children, or the moon landing – but also how those events were experienced at the time. In other words, Kawara’s “entries” to an extent can be understood as historical sources, as keys opening a door onto how people experienced the world at the time. Thus, we gain unique access to the symbolic meaning of eating spaghetti (which might well have been very different from today) or of what Kawara and contemporaries, such as the Austrian Philosopher Günther Anders who dealt with the same topics as Kawara (Hiroshima, Vietnam, and the moon-landing), thought about the dramatic change of perspective offered from the Moon on the Blue Planet. Hence, too, Kawara’s quote of a Russian astrophysicist: “Time is thin around the cause and dense around the effect”.⁵

⁵ Quoted in Watkins, *On Kawara*, 45.



Fig. 32: On Kawara, *JUNE 16, 1966*, accompanied by the entry: “Two Tankers and two tugboats crashed in a fiery disaster in Lower New York Bay, 1966”. From the *Today Series*, 1966 – present © On Kawara.

Diaries, chronicles, note-books, collections of fragments, commentaries and aphorisms form a family of texts, a genre. All share that they depict neither the subject nor the world as such, but rather the relationship between the subject and his or her world, in time. By focussing on this relationship, it becomes evident that subject and world are not – as in the traditional philosophical epistemology – independent entities, which one can unproblematically link to each other. Both exist only in relation to each other. A subject is a subject only when related to a world, whereas the world (in a strong sense of the word) only exists when it is symbolised by subjects. So, all forms of what I will call the *essayistic genre* (including diaries, chronicles, note-books, collections of fragments) are subjective documents of modern world-participation. Time, as a cultural construct, is an essential aspect of being in the world, thin in the cause, yet dense in the effect. Essayistic forms, by consequence, *tend to* refer to time because they reflect on the condition of life in modern times.

The diary is a very specific kind of text and genre.⁶ It is the only type of text in which the entry in the notebook, this symbolic machinery for future recollection, is linked with a specific date. But as the history of time shows, time is not a natural pre-condition of thinking; it is not a natural phenomenon at all. The firmament above us, sun and moon, sunrise and sunset, seasons, all those phenomena were relevant for the invention of time, yet they achieved this relevance only with regard to human beings observing and measuring the regularities of change and motion. Here, it is important to note that different cultures have different dates, calendars, years and days. Yet it is equally important to stress that our modern (European) culture has created a cultural project of radical time-making and *temporalisation* (transformation of occurrences into time-coded events). What is more, its principle unit of accounting lies at the heart of every diary, whether written or painted: the day. Only as a result of occidental *temporalisation* has the day become the important and relevant unit of events that happen in a precise unit of time.

The author/s of the famous Annals of St Gall, for instance, still fixed events in the unit of the year. In contrast with our time, there was no entry for every year, as certain years lacked significant events:

709. Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died.

710. Hard Year and deficient in crops

711.

712. Flood everywhere

713.

714. Pippin, mayor of the palace, died.⁷

As a result of temporalisation, the day subsequently became increasingly relevant as the unit of counting time, because it could be cut in exact pieces of hours by using new methods of time-organisation and time-measurement. Historians commonly argue that it was the institution of the monastery that first developed a time-regime. It is thus also the monastery which made it possible to organise the day in the following way:

3 January 1970: A large tropical bird, the casquet hornbill, that eluded nets and tranquilizer guns and scorned lures of food as it swooped through the chilly skies of Manhattan's Upper East Side in New York, was netted on a penthouse ledge at 710 Park Avenue, near 70th Street, about 3.40 p.m. today.⁸

⁶ Arno Dusini, *Tagebuch. Möglichkeiten einer Gattung*, München 2005, 43-77.

⁷ Quoted in Hayden White, *The Content of Form. Narrative, Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore 1987, 6.

⁸ On Kawara quoted in Watkins, *On Kawara*, 89.

This event can be fixed to a singular moment in time, to a precise date. And only because of this does it become an event in the strong sense of the word. The monks, by contrast, lived with a completely different way of thinking and accounting for time, which Benedict Anderson (following Erich Auerbach) has called "overtime simultaneity. Everything that has happened is part of one and the same eternity at every time".⁹ By contrast, the (post-)modernist artist lives in a symbolic world in which time is empty and homogenous. His/her time is linear and measurable with terrifying exactitude.

The medium is the message: the medium of the monks in St Gall was a chronicle based on a closed time-circuit in which there could be no difference between cosmos, the bible and history. Kawara's medium is the newspaper, a medium that allows synchronicity of events which have no *real* relation to each other. Thus, Kawara's way of painting dates differs from the annals of St Gall in many ways, but coincides with the latter in a single way: in the seemingly objective, indifferent gesture of the contemporary observer there is an evident lack of subjectivity. Yet whereas the pre-modern chronicler was unable to note personal interests down in a personal commentary trying to understand and reflect upon the events, the post-modernist Date painter can, but in so doing he depicts and constructs a life in a labyrinth of contingent events that do not seem to show any obvious or substantial link to his person, a life after the humanistic concept of individuality. His aesthetic experience thereby succeeds that of classical modernism and *essayism*. Every diary needs – at least as a dimension of its reception, reflection or symbolisation – a reference to a reality outside, which transcends the subject as such. Both, the entries in the annals and the *Date paintings*, are related to those events. To the author/s in St Gall, the world outside was self-evident, including his/their subjectivity which could only have been embedded in a unified cosmos; to the post-modernist Date painter there is self-evidence neither with regard to the world nor to the subject. Subjectivity is, as I shall reveal presently, reduced to the act of painting itself. In this sense, Kawara is the heir of that particular type of classical modernism I have referred in the first part of this article. Whereas the monk had no idea of essayism, because he did not know that the world was, in a complex way, his own construction, the Date painter deconstructs the idea of essayism, and thus cancels the idea of classical participation, nevertheless maintaining the idea of experimental and artificial living. He organises his life according to

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Die Erfindung der Nation. Zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts*. Übersetzung Benedikt Burkard und Christoph Münz, Frankfurt am Main [1983]1996, 33.

modern time-organisation and intends at least virtually to be subjected to the modern time-regime as much as the monk in the monastery was subjected to the strict order of time kept in his convent. Yet Kawara's aesthetic experiment of painting time is an effort to meditate on the indifference of modern time.

The medium Kawara prefers in his *Date Paintings* is the newspaper, which structurally does not know a first or a last day. The newspaper (in German *Zeitung*, etymologically derived from *Zeit*, time), as a cultural invention, had two preconditions that went hand in hand: printing and time-management.¹⁰ The first newspapers were not dailies; they were published every fortnight or every month. The *daily* newspaper is the first modern medium that delivered events in the unit of one and the same day. Structurally, it promoted its readers to commentators of the newspaper on the day, and this is what Kawara, too, came to realise to the full, it seems, especially in his *Date paintings* produced between 1966 and 1972. Time makes two things measurable: it gives every reported event a fixed date, and it makes it possible to reduce individuals' lives to an enormous sum of days. As Jonathan Watkins has pointed out:

On Kawara has painted over two thousand *Date Paintings* since he began the *Today Series* on 4 January 1966. He calculates that he has spent more than three years actually in the process of making these painted canvases, deliberately, not incidentally, marking the time involved. There are not only the artist's journals recording the annual production of the *Date Paintings*, but also a 100 Year Calendar with coloured dots indicating the days on which *Date paintings* were made. [...] In the case of the Calendar, we are also made aware of the number of days passed since the artist was born – dotted yellow – approximately 25,000 at the time of this books' publication, and so these are being *enumerated* too.¹¹

This phantasm of exact (calculated) self-documentation leads to strange issues. Taken to the limit of its possibilities, it informs the reader of Lichtenberg's *Sudelbücher* how often the author had sex. In the case of Schnitzler's diaries, the reader is informed about the (enormous) number of sex-partners. A certain amount of statistics is inevitable, as it is written into the logic of diarizing, of diary-writing. Kawara's idea of counting his paintings as he does with the days of his life, is a late response to that idea of writing. But here, the accounting of events in time is reduced to a numeric unity; the times of day since his birth, the time of the beginning the diary of paintings. Perhaps because his work is less informed by the

¹⁰ Anderson, *Die Erfindung der Nation*, 40.

¹¹ Watkins, *On Kawara*, 55.

Christian tradition, his practice does not involve confession, and simply point to the phantasm of documentation. Concentration on the pure number of days suggests that Kawara's version of essayism is based on the experience of contingency. The huge number of dates does not allow any integration into life. The same is true for the immense mass of events that are written into his project. A game of Monopoly, as the elections in India, are connected only by the symbolically empty order of time.

Developments in the construction of time-measuring and the modern economy historically go hand in hand. Here, I do not refer to the simple but historically very important fact that it became decisive to have money at the right moment to be able to start economical or other projects. The whole system of loan and interest is based on the connection between time and money, on the possibility to earn money because of the difference of or in time: days, years, months. What I find more important, however, is the phenomenon in which economic and religious motifs got inextricably linked and intertwined. Diaries are conceived in analogy with financial accounts. At the same time, these books, as for example Lichtenberg's *Sudelbücher* (literally "rough books" or "scratch pads"), represent a specific form of accounting. The diarist is a person obsessed by the idea of creating a permanent balance sheet of his or her life. So he or she is forced to continue with the never ending job of life-accounting. A limit is reached only when life would be transformed into pure life-accounting, into date-writing, or *Date painting*, and life and the arts would subsequently be reduced to an act of sheer self-referencing. In occidental culture, this kind of modern subjectivity is a secularised version of the Christian God, who knows and sees all, but has nothing to do with anything after the creation of his toy-world. There is no escape from this *Man*. Ego-documents such as diaries or notebooks in the Lichtenbergian style, consequently, can be seen as modern forms of confession.

The diary, this *letter* which usually has no explicit or personal addressee – although there may be an implicit one as in St Augustine (God), in Montaigne (a dead friend), or in Lichtenberg (his mother)¹² – obeys a very specific order of time. Whereas all forms of autobiography and memoir reconstruct the lost time of life, maintaining it in a retrospective narrative, the diary suggests the idea of simultaneity. As I have argued, a date is given by man. Time is not a reality in a natural sense but a construct, as Novalis, one of the most radical essayists, already pointed out in *Fragments and Studies until 1797* (one of his collections which has been written day by

¹² See: Wolfgang Müller-Funk, *Erfahrung und Experiment. Studien zu Theorie und Geschichte des Essayismus*, Berlin 1995.

day): "Time can never end. We cannot *think away* time, because time is really the condition for a thinking being – Time only ends with thinking. Thinking out of time is nonsense".¹³

Thus, the *I am still alive* telegrams (or the *I got up* postcards) which Kawara sent to his friends in addition to the processing work of *Date paintings*, can be seen¹⁴ as an ironic answer to Descartes (and nearly all of aesthetic modernism is a response to Descartes' philosophical rationalism), but self-reflection is at the same time a necessary corner-stone for the paradoxes of his project. Awareness of being in the world and in time generates inter-subjectivity. The idea of self-reflection depends on the presence of the Other as the third instance. This Other must not be a personal addressee, although Kawara uses some friends as addressees for his telegrams, these forerunners of fax and e-mail. The Other is the one who lives just in time with the writer, the artist, because he uses the same medium. S/he confirms the existence of the time we share with others through culture. It is the newspaper or any other modern medium that represents this Other, who lives in the same uniform and homogenized symbolic world. S/he is the profane version of the transcendental Other, who was imagined to know everything beyond time and space. The newspaper is, as Hegel already pointed out, the Morning Prayer of modern times. It is the centre of a mass ceremony exercised privately in the lion's den of the head (Eisenstein). Thus, artists like Kawara are related to the medium and to the modern community of this secular Morning Prayer as commentators who make explicit what is usually implicit and self-evident: the modern world of media, the regime of time and dates.

Significantly, it would appear that each letter, including the one that arrives hours or years after the writer's death, that brings the message of being alive in Kawara is linked with the traumatic event of Hiroshima. His work adds up to the monotonous sentence of a survivor: I am still alive. There were of course modernist *authors* too (like Kafka, Beckett and Jabés) who wrote to live and survive. So, the message of Kawara's telegrams might be – despite their sarcastic and ironic monotony – quite humorous, especially when he looks into the abyss of time, as in his 1999 *One million years. Past and future: from 998031 BC to 1969 AD*, and *from 1993 AD to 1000192 AD*.¹⁵ But there is another old utopia from the very beginning of

¹³ Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), *Werke*, herausgegeben und kommentiert von Gerhard Schulz, München 1981, 312, my translation.

¹⁴ As illustrated by Watkins, *On Kawara*; see also Jeanne Marie Kusina, *I am still alive. The Search for On Kawara*, York University 2005, on www.yorku.ca/history/KusinaOnKawara (consulted 27.6. 2009, 12:30).

¹⁵ On Kawara, *One Million Years* (CD), Düsseldorf 2002.

the avant-garde whose late heir Kawara has become: the idea of uniting life and the arts.

Romanticism and Hope: Beyond Utopia.

In a laconic way, *essayism* can be defined as a form of thinking in time not within the framework of traditional philosophy but rather in the medium of literature and the arts. Essayism is the impossible third between traditional philosophy and traditional arts. Yet it is not only a way of thinking but also a way of living. In Musil's famous the *Man without Qualities* the protagonist proposes to his cousin Diotima to live as if in a novel,¹⁶ that is, to live only the important and essential, to transform life into art. German Romantic Friedrich Schlegel depicted this proto-avant-gardist idea in his famous 116th *Athenaeum-Fragment*, when he characterised the new Romantic movement as follows:

Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. Its goal and destination is not only to unify all the separated genres of poetry and to bring poetry in contact with philosophy and rhetoric. It also will and shall once mingle or once melt together poetry and prose, geniality and critic, poetry of the arts and poetry of the nature. It will and shall make poetry living and social and life and society poetic.¹⁷

This is a concept of reciprocal emotional charging: it implies an emotional charging of the arts, which become *elan vital* by integrating life, and the charging of life, which becomes important by being constructed like a work of art. But the result of Romanticism, the avant-garde and even the trans-avant-garde, is not authentic life, but new forms of fine arts, now further differentiated as a system in modern society. The idea of an aesthetically grounded life, especially in the post-modern, western world, has become quite influential, even though it is reduced to the idea of simple design and the right way of self-presentation. The concept of melting together life and the arts also created a new bohemian and, later, a moderate form of post-bohemian life-style in the arts itself, at least a lifestyle for the artists and their surroundings.

Undoubtedly, Kawara can be seen as an ascetic successor of Schlegel's project. His work is a part of that project, which further includes the ready-made. There is a mixture of reflection and philosophy: existential-

¹⁶ See his *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 9, herausgegeben von Adolf Frisé, Reinbek 1979, 573.

¹⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Schriften zur Literatur*, herausgegeben von Wolf Dietrich Rasch, München 1972, 37, my translation.

ism, a bit of esoteric speculation, and the link to the contemporary networks of the avant-garde in Japan and the United States. There is also a mixture of aesthetic media: pictograms, icons, writing and painting. All of these are brought together into the same semiotic realm. But more importantly, the *Date paintings* refer to the artist as such. Travelling – a major topic in post-modern cultural studies – all around the world, the artist organised his daily life and occupation by *Date Paintings*, charting events that are political because they are events in the media of time. Kawara organises his life as a contemporary and thus his art as contemporary art, in a very radical sense, as an art just in time. His diarizing changes his own life and transforms the artist in a living work of art. And *vice versa* his series of works of art become living because of the manifestation of an irritated ego that sends telegrams with the message *I am still alive* or postcards stating *I got up* (including the exact time of such events) from 1968 to 1979.¹⁸

Yet as others before, Kawara brings his own variant of the concept of unifying art and life. There is no longer an emphasis on the power of synthesis the German Romantics liked so much. Instead, one is confronted with an asymmetry between *subjective* and *objective* aspects, between spaghetti and the A-bomb. The importance of public events does not really correspond to those of daily life.

As far as I can see, Kawara also brings no project for the future. All the unforeseen events he enters into his journal of *Date Paintings* refer to one traumatic event: Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This marks a critical moment in human civilisation. The bomb, Vietnam and the moon-landing are events permanently pointing to human disaster. To speak with Günther Anders, a follower of Heidegger, Kawara's is a post-human perspective: a world without (wo)man,¹⁹ but also a world of (wo)man without a world.²⁰ The first aspect here is the result of the possible power of real destruction; the second ties in with the fact that such power transcends the possibility of understanding. A world with links to a participating subject means a world of meaning and symbolic forms. As observers of Kawara's painting, we are not forced to think that this disaster has already become real, but that there is a strong tendency in the world to overcome the human measure. Essayism has always been a symptom of crisis: the cruel religious

¹⁸ On Kawara, *Date Paintings - Today Series* (Audio) - Museum Ludwig - Köln - Episode 252440. www.podcast.de/.../130_On_Kawara:_Date_Paintings_-_Today_Series (consulted on 21.6. 2009)

¹⁹ Günther Anders, *Die atomare Drohung*, 2. erweiterte Auflage, München 1981, 1-10.

²⁰ See Günther Anders, *Mensch ohne Welt. Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur*, München 1984.

wars in Montaigne, the French Revolution and its perversion in the case of the German Romantics, the crisis of modernist culture in Musil.

With regard to those diarists and essayists, Kawara's work has a moment of radical outdoing and beating. In contrast to most literary diarizing works, his project of *Date painting* has a specific form of presence and presentation. Usually, diaries and notebooks are published long after their genesis, after their date of production and reference. Hence, there is a marked difference of time between coding and decoding, between production and reception. On Kawara's telegrams programmatically make clear that the event, the entry and the *reading* could happen on the same day. The internet today too can establish such a real-time. It reveals a subject after the end of the classic subject, which announces that it is here and still alive in time, referring to the universal diary of the modern media complex.

The term postmodernism, so we know, does not only indicate a period after modernism, but also an advance, a reflection on its predecessor. The fantasy to bridge the split of time is written into modern computer soft-ware. To some extent, Kawara's paintings follow a post-modern ethic (in a Lyotardian sense), an ethic of defence and irony.²¹ Yet the outfit of his work is both offensive and playful. The *Date Paintings* can be decoded – like many diarizing predecessors – as exercises in modern contingency, which nevertheless have a fixed, *objective* reference as in traditional forms of ego-documents: the irritating experience of destruction symbolised by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of the end of the world in an endless series of entries day by day. "Recently the notion of humanity has been threatened by matter. In daily life I feel this every moment. Political and economic anxieties overwhelm individuals".²²

There is no (traditional) *utopia* of a better world in Kawara, but there is hope. As in every diary, his entries establish a system of signs for remembering – not just now, but also later on. Thus, they presuppose subjects after the end of the traditional subject, who are able and willing to read their message. This is not only the ironic message *I am still alive* but also the narrative *tableau* of spaghetti-eating children, which includes hope and consolation, face to face with modern events that transcend homogenous time: the Shoah, the possibility of collective human self-destruction on many levels, from the bomb to genetic engineering.

²¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmoderne Moralitäten*. Aus dem Französischen von Gabriele Rieke und Ronald Voulié, Wien 1998[1993], 173-86.

²² On Kawara in 1955, quoted in Watkins, *On Kawara*, 42.

Postscript

Kawara's oeuvre holds a spatial element as well, which becomes striking in the era of so-called globalisation.²³ Sending telegrams from all over the world, from abroad to home, and vice versa, his art-works document an act of constant travel. Kawara is a digital as well as real traveller, who dwells through global space. Perhaps, because of that he represents a new type of artist, whose self-understanding is no longer restricted to his homeland Japan. He is a global, or better, a universal symbolic player. The same is true for his addressees, who come to form an audience no longer restricted by spatial barriers.

One could also describe his journey from East to West and back, from West to East, as a narrative about the avant-garde and modernism, as a journey into Western time, because the split between subjective and objective time is the result of "our" Western culture. This split changed the world dramatically: industrialisation, speed, traffic, capitalism, the dynamic of modern peace and war. As such Kawara's travelling is also a form of productive appropriation, an adaptation and contextualisation of Western time and – because of that – of Western modernism and the avant-garde. The latter, after all, arose thanks to the invention of modern time in Western, European culture, and aimed for either an imaginary return to the time before time, or an imagined advance to a time beyond time.

²³ Mike Featherstone, *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, London 1990; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1996.

The Colour of Modernism: Colour-Form Experiments in Europe and Australia

Andrew McNamara (QUT, Brisbane)

Europe 2008, 1973

Early 20th-century colour-form experimentation continues to exert a curious fascination nearly a century later. One reason for this appeal is that the work promised so much: it articulated an affinity across various arts; it forged cross-media and inter-disciplinary explorations (encompassing light projection, film and cinema, photography, music, the built environment, science, even touching on education, medicine and engineering); and it sought to dismantle art as an arena of specialist academic expertise in favour of empowering (both individual and collective) generic creative attributes. Such aesthetic experimentation aimed not only to revitalize human sense perception; it also sought to transform all of life, thereby suggesting a scale of ambition unimaginable today. Yet, this occurred at a time when the infrastructure and support for modern art was infinitesimal compared to the contemporary situation. Furthermore, while many of the key characteristics of this work are frequently associated with much later 20th-century art (or even contemporary) practices, the original aspirations of such experimentation are now treated as the utopian delusion of an idealist time, one far remote from our own. In contemporary art and culture, there is a marked reticence about any appeals to a grand unity, a higher mystical experience or a spiritual-cultural renewal that once sustained colour theory and practice. In short, the contemporary attitude to such lofty ambition is tempered by profound ambivalence.

A 2008 survey exhibition of the Viennese artist Heimo Zobernig presents a good example of the push and pull attraction in contemporary attitudes. The website of the host institution for Zobernig's survey, Tate St. Ives, explains that Zobernig's art "critically engages" with the full gamut of the modernist legacy, though "with a lightness of touch and an

economy of material that is at times playful, dry, witty, unsettling and disarming”.¹ In other words, Zobernig revisits former glories, but with ironic detachment. The museum didactics further proclaim that the artist’s work is informed by “extensive investigations of colour theory and its failings as an objective system of analysis”.² Clearly Tate St. Ives aims to present Zobernig as a thoughtful and intriguing artist, but our contemporary cultural ambitions appear forlorn and redundant if the best we can say of them is that they are devoted to an endless picking over the failures of the past, whether colour theory or early modernist utopianism.

This seemingly terminal situation is not new. When Gerhard Richter painted his Colour Charts in the 1960s and returned to them again in 1973, he declared that they eschewed any grand ambition for colour. All they show is how “a few examples of an infinite variety of mixtures and possible arrangements represent the infinite number of never-to-be-realized possibilities, the boundless and utter and complete meaninglessness that I consider quite hopeful”.³ Perfectly suspended between pop and hard edge abstraction, but also between the evocative echo of transcendental art and ordinary, everyday colour charts found in hardware shops, Richter’s colour chart paintings reenact an art-historical drama with an altered script. Colour is once again centre stage, but this time as testimony to the need to establish a distance from modernist utopianism. The colour charts present an image of painting stripped of any aspiration or guarantee beyond the mechanical act of painting, that is, remorselessly delineating endless permutations of this “artificial naturalism”. Based on three primary colours plus grey depicted “in constant proportion”, but in “an ever-increasing degree of differentiation”: 4 colours x 4 new permutations = 16 x the 4 base components again (red, blue, yellow and grey) = 64 x 4 = 256 x 4 = 1024. This process held a strange fascination, Richter declared, because “if I had painted all possible permutations, it would need over 400 billion light years to pass from the first picture to the last picture”.⁴ Frankly, it seems preposterous to rehearse an infinite variety of possibilities that will never be realized, but the point, as Stefan Germer

¹ The survey occurred at Tate St. Ives (4 October 2008–11 January 2009). <http://www.tate.org.uk/stives/exhibitions/heimozobernig> (Accessed March, 2009)

² <http://www.tate.org.uk/stives/exhibitions/heimozobernig/exguide6.shtm>

³ Gerhard Richter, “From a letter to Jean-Christophe Ammann, 24.2.73”, in: *Gerhard Richter*, Tate exhibition catalogue, London 1991, 110. (“wo einige wenige Beispiele von unendlich vielen Mischungen und möglichen Anordnungen für die unendlichen nie zu verwirklichenden Möglichkeiten stehen, für das Uferlose, ganz und gar Sinnlose, das ich für so hoffungsvoll halte.”)

⁴ Richter, “1024 Colours in 4 Permutations” (1974), in: *Gerhard Richter*, 111.

asserts, is that Richter's charts defiantly establish that colour "is always mediated rather than 'natural'". The consequence, Germer further argues, is the realization that colour no longer acts as "the quintessential medium of transcendental experience or means of expressing unmediated energy".⁵

While such commentary implies that a clear point of demarcation has been reached, colour still remains the privileged vehicle for grasping it. One reason for this is that colour-form experiments underpin assumptions about the legitimacy and comprehension of modernist visual arts practices, which in turn tell us much about the scope, vagaries and perplexity of modernist cultural aspirations *in general*. The following discussion therefore explores what was at stake *culturally* and *artistically* in early modernist colour-form experiments. The aim is not to scrutinize the viability of a color system or its theory, or to detail the complexity of colour and its history, but instead to show how such experimentation was a response to the quandary of modernist culture and the uncertain place it assigns to art.

Sydney 1919

In August 1919 two young artists held an exhibition, "Colour in Art", in Sydney featuring eleven small, brightly coloured, but essentially semi-naturalist paintings. They declared that their works were devised according to a theory of composition based on the purported affinity between the colour spectrum and the musical octave. The staging of the exhibition was quite theatrical: the audience was seated in rows (as if attending a lecture or recital); the paintings were placed on stage; music was performed to accompany the art; in addition, discs, scales, a "Colour Key Board" as well as three "colour organizations in Interior Decoration" were displayed with titles like "Interior in the Key of Yellow" or "Interior, in Orange Red Key". On top of this, the artists, Roland Wakelin and Roy de Maistre (then de Mestre), gave talks seeking to explain their colour-music theory.

The atmospherics were as much ominous as celebratory. There was an anti-modernist contingent in attendance, vehemently hostile to modernism, which they dismissed as cosmopolitan artifice devoid of national sentiment, ephemeral, decadent, not worthy of high art. Held in the aftermath of World War One, there was an air of spiritual and religious yearning with theosophy quite popular in Sydney and, as Heather Johnson

⁵ Stefan Germer, "Retrospective Ahead", tr. Julia L. Berhard and Michael Robinson, in: *Gerhard Richter*, 28.



Fig. 33: A 2009 installation shot of a partial reconstruction of the de Maistre and Wakelin 1919 “Colour in Art” in the *Modern Times* exhibition, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne (July 2009). Pictured from right to left: two de Maistre works based on musical themes, *Arrested Phrase from Hadyn Trio in orange-red minor* (1919-35) and *Arrested Phrase from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in red major* (1919-35), with a study; Margaret Preston’s *Implement Blue*, 1927; and finally a set of de Maistre’s colour discs, scales and wheels.

notes, due to unfathomable war losses, a recourse to “spiritualism as a means of communicating with suddenly lost husbands, sons and brothers”.⁶ In addition, a curfew for the “Spanish Flu” pandemic, the viral globalism that followed the end of the war, had just been lifted. Against this backdrop, at the outer reaches of modernist ambition, these artists boldly presented their case for such colour experiments. The next day a mainstream newspaper gave its account of this “new theory of colour organization”: “In Sydney there is a young artist who can stand before any of his pictures and whistle it, or play its theme on a piano!”⁷

⁶ Heather Johnson, “The 1919 Colour-Music Exhibition: How Did It Happen?”, in: Nick Waterlow & Annabel Pegus (eds.), *Colour in Art: Revisiting 1919*, exhibition catalogue, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, August-September 2008, 12.

⁷ “What is Modern Art? Pictures Set to Music”, in: *Daily Telegraph*, 9 August 1919, 8.

When seen grouped together these small, “soft” modernist works appear quite abstract due to their vivid colour.⁸ The colour-music analogy thus yielded the first sniff of abstraction in Australia. In this system, middle C on the keyboard was equated with yellow. While their premises originated in fine art, both artists felt its implications would extend far beyond modernist abstraction. De Maistre would soon develop and patent colour charts for use in design (of the kind Richter mimicked many decades later), but he also had recent experience with colour in the treatment of shell shock victims from the war.⁹ Wakelin’s 1919 lecture still survives today and he makes three essential points:

- (i) The artists hoped to derive a colour system akin to music: “The colour scales [...] constitute a system of colour organization, whereby the colourist may obtain definite colour harmonies in different keys and in different gradations of colour tones, in somewhat the same manner as the musician obtains harmonies in sound”.
- (ii) The system will find wider application in “many and various forms of colour expression, such as painting – interior and exterior decoration – dress – and the Applied Arts generally”.
- (iii) Finally, the next stage in such developments will likely be “a new medium of colour expression in the form of projected coloured lights”.¹⁰

De Maistre’s talk, by contrast, exists only in the fragmentary form reproduced in the 1919 catalogue. It is sufficient to establish some key points: first, like modernism, colour constituted an emerging global aesthetic phenomenon (an aesthetic correlate of the Spanish Flu!). A “latent colour sense”, de Maistre asserted, was emerging “in every country throughout the world”. Second, while the scientific explanation of colour had its merits, de Maistre believed that colour “brings the consciousness realization of the deepest underlying principles of nature, and in it they find deep and lasting happiness – for those people it constitutes the very

⁸ Refer the reconstruction, the exhibition and catalogue, *Colour in Art: Revisiting 1919*, which subsequently toured with the *Modern Times* exhibition.

⁹ De Maistre’s colour wheel, *The De Maistre Colour Harmonising Chart*, was patented and made commercially available from 1924. Colour therapy for shell shock treatment was conducted under the auspices of Dr Charles Gordon Moffitt. See Heather Johnson, *Roy de Maistre: The Australian Years 1894-1930*, Roseville-Sydney 1988, 20, 23-7, 30-1.

¹⁰ Roland Wakelin, “Colour in Art” (1919), in: Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara & Philip Goad (eds.), *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967*, Melbourne 2006, 63.

song of life and is, as it were, the spiritual speech of every living thing”.¹¹ Notably, a reference to “depth” is made twice in this passage. It points to the extra-aesthetic significance of colour, but with a qualification. Colour constituted an emerging global awareness, yet true colour awareness amounted to the preserve of the very few. By adding this twist, de Maistre exposed the tension that early modernism constantly sought to negotiate. Colour could help articulate the generic “aesthetic” attributes of every human being, but only the more arcane explorers – typified by modern artists – probed to the extent of revealing its “deepest underlying principles”. Art, in other words, challenged itself in order to challenge and transform the sensibility of everyone. Sheer experiment and the probing of boundaries required some greater guarantee; this remained a persistent challenge for modernist art. With colour-form experimentation, the guarantee took the form of a promise of a new, more resonant aesthetic-cultural fulfillment for everyone.

Weimar 1922-25

Wakelin would eventually dismiss the colour-music analogy as spurious, but in 1919 he believed it had untapped the key to all pictorial expression, which simultaneously held the prospect of much wider application. Most significant of all, his prediction that a new medium of “projected colour lights” would emerge proved prescient. Within a few short years on the other side of the globe, Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, a student at the Bauhaus developed such a medium in Weimar, Germany, which he called *Colour Light Plays* (*Farbenlichtspiele*). By a fateful irony of history, Hirschfeld-Mack would eventually end up in Australia himself after fleeing Nazi Germany,

¹¹ Roy de Maistre, “Colour in relation to Painting” (1919), in: Stephen, McNamara & Goad (eds.), *Modernism & Australia*, 62. Deborah Hart has traced the source of de Maistre’s text to Beatrice Irwin, who before World War One gave performances of “colour poems”, refer her “Beatrice Irwin and Grace Cossington Smith: Women on the Wings of Colour in Art”, in: *Symposium Papers: Colour in Art – Revisiting 1919 & R-Balson/41: Anthony Hordens’ Fine Art Galleries*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney 2008, 18. Johnson reports diverse influences on de Maistre regarding colour and music: such as his art teacher Dattilo Rubbo, who wrote an essay, “Colour Harmony”, on Chevreul’s theories in 1914; Moffitt and medical literature (for instance, articles on the relation of tone deafness to color blindness); American “Synchromist” painting; A. B. Hector who in Sydney in 1913 built a “mechanism for showing an harmonious arrangement of colours to correspond with music”; the Belgian musician Henri Verbrugghen, the first director of New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music, Sydney in 1915, and his son, Adrian, who was familiar with modernism, and with whom de Maistre constructed a “lumiére” purportedly based on ideas similar to Hector; refer *Roy de Maistre: The Australian Years*, 18-36.



Fig. 34: In 1925, Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack produced a catalogue explaining the thinking behind his *Farbenlichtspiele* (Colour Light Plays), which he first developed at the Weimar Bauhaus. The catalogue also reveals that Hirschfeld-Mack toured extensively throughout middle or central Europe with his apparatus.

where he lived largely in artistic anonymity and most likely never heard a word about the de Maistre-Wakelin colour experiments of 1919.¹²

Hirschfeld-Mack claimed his inspiration for constructing his colour-light apparatus occurred at the Bauhaus in June 1922 when viewing the performance of shadow plays conducted by fellow students, Kurt Schwerdtfeger, with the assistance of Josef Hartwig. Recalling in 1963 that their performances used “one light source only and cardboard figures moved by hand”, for him the pivotal impression was sparked by accident.¹³ Watching Schwerdtfeger and Hartwig prepare “a simple shadow show [...] for a lantern party”, he noticed a replaced acetylene lamp had doubled the amount of shadows on a translucent paper screen and, due to this chance effect, “a ‘cold’ and ‘warm’ shadow became

¹² For a full account of Hirschfeld-Mack’s career after the Bauhaus and his deportation from England to Australia, refer Andreas Hapkemeyer & Peter Stasny (eds.), *Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack: Baubäusler und Visionär*, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2000, plus also my essay, “The Bauhaus in Australia”, in Ann Stephen, Philip Goad, and Andrew McNamara, *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, Melbourne 2008, 2-15.

¹³ Peter Stasny, “Die Farbenlichtspiele”, in: *Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack: Baubäusler und Visionär*, 94.

visible". The idea struck Hirschfeld-Mack of greatly multiplying the sources of light and projecting them through coloured glass in order to advance the awkward, primitive projections of Schwerdtfeger and Hartwig into a more technologically sophisticated orchestra of light-color projections accompanied by sound to cue the visual motion. The result, he proclaimed, was "a new mode of expression" featuring a "mobility of colored light sources".¹⁴

Like de Maistre and Wakelin, Hirschfeld-Mack was also intrigued by colour-music affinities, but his prime inspiration came from cinema.¹⁵ In his 1925 catalogue seeking to clarify the objectives of the *Farbenlichtspiele*, an awe-struck Hirschfeld-Mack recounted the impact of the first film he had seen before the war in Munich in 1912: "the power of the abrupt changes from sudden to slow movements, of a multitude of light in a darkened room, the transformation of the light from brightest white to darkest black". Virtually ignoring the "insipid" plot, Hirschfeld-Mack had visualized a purely abstract performance of projected light. Later in 1922, Hirschfeld-Mack would present the first performances of his *Farbenlichtspiele*; they would feature in the 1923 Bauhaus Week and he would tour the device extensively between 1923 and 1925. It would take a couple of years to refine the apparatus, but it was a hit in the 1923 Bauhaus Week. Éva Forgács explains the impact well:

The abstract shapes moved about, and stayed in continuous motion, the series of colour- and form-compositions were constantly changing, and the picture not only moved, but moved out into space, that is, dissolved all static constraints, and became disembodied as well: light endowed these works with a cosmic character.¹⁶

The extraordinary technical and engineering feat of Hirschfeld-Mack's *Colour Light Plays* was not the sole reason for giving the apparatus a pride of place in the finale to Bauhaus Week. The Bauhaus had become newly receptive to the constructivist ethos, which had been endeavoring to liberate art from the wall for "almost a decade". Rendering the appearance of three-dimensional reflected light meant a significant technical and critical-aesthetic advance because such an innovative new medium seem-

¹⁴ Hirschfeld-Mack, *Farbenlicht-Spiele-Wesen-Ziele-Kritiken*, Weimar, exhibition catalogue, 1925. An original copy exists in the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin with a reprint in his publication, *The Bauhaus: an introductory survey* (Victoria, Australia, 1963). Walter Gropius wrote the foreword.

¹⁵ Hirschfeld-Mack, *Farbenlicht-Spiele-Wesen-Ziele-Kritiken*.

¹⁶ Éva Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics*, tr. John Bakti, Budapest 1995, 93.

ingly offered “even richer potential” than the first challenges of constructivism.¹⁷

The same factors played a role in Hirschfeld-Mack assuming responsibility for the first colour seminar at the Bauhaus. It had long been the ambition of Johannes Itten to offer a course devoted to colour at the Bauhaus – it was even approved by the Council of Masters (20 October 1922) – but Itten was sacked before it could be taught. It was left to Hirschfeld-Mack, a former student, to deliver the first dedicated course on colour (as an unofficial course) in the winter semester of 1922-23.¹⁸ Hirschfeld-Mack was a good choice because he had studied colour in Stuttgart with Adolf Hölzel, one of Itten’s pivotal influences in this field of inquiry.¹⁹ Furthermore, both Hirschfeld-Mack and Itten trained as teachers, both held a progressive view of education and both emphasized creative development as well as the “personal growth” of the student.²⁰ Finally, both consistently maintained the core tenets of Hölzel’s approach to colour-form experiment throughout their respective careers: the focus on picture plane and frame; point and line exercises; emphasis on the geometrical forms of triangle, square and the circle as well as horizontal, vertical, the diagonal and circular; rules for proportion (e.g. the Golden Section); contrast of light and dark; harmony as a balance of contrasts. The play of light and dark contrasts appears in quite minimalist compositions produced by Hirschfeld-Mack from this period, 1922-23.²¹ These particular colour-form emphases would continue to be reiterated by Hirschfeld-Mack in post-World War Two lectures in Australia – he even urged that one of the goals of post-war reconstruction should include a world conference “to fix colour scales and colour discs internationally”.²²

As stated, the impetus to develop a new medium of colour-light-sound projections was not simply technical. Hirschfeld-Mack stated that many artists at the time (and not just the constructivists) were pondering the fate of painting and wondering whether painting had become redundant. While Thierry de Duve relates this fear (and challenge) to the consequences of industrialization – painters were made bereft “of their traditional social function as purveyors of images” – Hirschfeld-Mack traced

¹⁷ Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics*, 123.

¹⁸ Rainer K. Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2000, 113.

¹⁹ Itten, by contrast, did not study directly with Hölzel because he could not take private students.

²⁰ Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, 93.

²¹ Now in the Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin.

²² Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, “General Colour Theory”, unpublished lecture, undated, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne, 4.



Fig. 35: An installation shot of work by Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack in the *Modern Times* exhibition at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne. It features Hirschfeld-Mack colour studies (primarily from the early 1920s) as well as an apparatus, a coloured pedal display, for his Colour-Chord Orchestra, which taught music by colour (c. early 1950s).

the origin of this discord back much further.²³ He was concerned that the overly subjectivist orientation of modernist aesthetics came at the expense of traditional communal cultural motivations (which underpinned Gothic art). This tendency stemmed not from cubism or Kandinsky, or even the constructivists, according to Hirschfeld-Mack, but Rembrandt because the Dutch painter departed from ecclesiastical painting in order to pursue his own personal artistic expression. Rembrandt explored light as if it constituted “a self-sufficient function, independent of his objective representations”.

Hirschfeld-Mack was clearly perturbed by the orientation of this trajectory. The consequence of this long development, as he understood it, is that art no longer exists as the “expression of human community”, “no longer supported by a ‘belief in Christ, common to all’” and thus painting lost its role as “the strong means of cohesion and expression” for the population at large. Thus, while Hirschfeld-Mack developed an inno-

²³ Thierry de Duve, “The Readymade and the Tube of Paint”, in: *Kant after Duchamp*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996, 171.

vative new medium of art, he felt that the critical-cultural impetus of modernity was culturally isolating – painting had become esoteric and the best work only understood by a very few (which recalls de Maistre’s comment about the true resonance of colour).²⁴ Hirschfeld-Mack hoped his new medium of reflected light compositions would replace painting as “a new means of expression for pictorial representation” and might even be capable of escaping the impasses of cultural modernity. Because colour is “constantly in evidence all around us”, it could be regarded as heralding a return to common aesthetic experiences, an aesthetic dimension to life shared by all and in evidence everywhere in everyday life.²⁵ Reflected light compositions, he hypothesized, could act as a “bridge of communication” by touching on a “substratum of feeling”, conveying complex effects, based on “instincts of colour and form”, yet not in the alienated mode of a viewer standing perplexed before an abstract painting devoid of understanding and any adequate cultural anchors. Instead, he hoped to elicit a “new creative attitude”.²⁶ In a 1954 lecture, “Creative Activity and Material Study”, delivered in Melbourne, Hirschfeld-Mack imputes a claim about active citizenship due to participation in the active shaping of basic materials and forms (from the ground up, as it were) into more complex mechanisms.²⁷ He even infused Hölzel’s basic principles with Quaker-like undertones about the male and female forces and the need to counteract destructive masculine tendencies. This is a gradual development but it underscores the odd mixture of modernist and traditional cultural impulses informing his ambitions. These could be accommodated (at least for a while) within the broad ambit of the Bauhaus because it was an institution driven by equally contradictory impulses.

After the Bauhaus moved to Dessau in 1925, however, Hirschfeld-Mack stayed behind in Thuringia to pursue the development of various colour-light machines, such as his *Farbenlichtspiele*.²⁸ In effect, he devoted himself to art education with the goal of unleashing the new creative attitude in young children. In the process he readily subsumed his individual artistic ambitions in favour of fostering the greater goal of a more universal conception of creativity.

²⁴ Hirschfeld-Mack, *Farbenlicht-Spiele-Wesen-Ziele-Kritiken*, 1925.

²⁵ Hirschfeld-Mack, “General Colour Theory”, 1.

²⁶ Hirschfeld-Mack, *Farbenlicht-Spiele-Wesen-Ziele-Kritiken*, 1925.

²⁷ Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, “Creative Activity and Material Study”, in: *Modernism & Australia*, 632-9.

²⁸ Hirschfeld-Mack patented a number of lighting devices when in exile in England from Nazism in the late 1930s.

Modernity – Now and Then

The fact that colour became an emblem of avant-garde ambition tells us much about both the breadth and complexity of modernist cultural prospects. Modernity involves, as Georg Simmel once put it, an investigation into the “inherent law of things” which in aesthetic terms is often translated into a definition of self-referentiality as wholly immanent, self-defining and perhaps even self-replicating.²⁹ Interestingly, Hirschfeld-Mack’s reading of Rembrandt’s trajectory more or less coincides with Simmel’s working definition of modernity, but he views it as an issue of concern. Curiously, Hirschfeld-Mack invoked an almost pre-modern conception of creativity as normatively valid and as exerting internally binding claims upon the living. As the philosopher, György Márkus points out, modernity elicited a new dimension of critical cultural activity understood as “autonomous” precisely because its works were *not* considered normatively valid or internally binding. Thus, modernity introduced a new, critical counterpart to the familiar conception of culture as a dialogical communication practiced by everyone. Modernity did not eradicate the generic conception of culture; it simply overlaid this mutually shared cultural orientation with a new sphere of probing, experimental or autonomous cultural activity, thus placing the two cultural orientations into active tension. As Márkus points out, however, the modernist critical propensity derived directly from Enlightenment critique, yet the Enlightenment vision was predicated on the assumption that critique would be a temporary phenomenon rather than a permanent feature of the social landscape. Critique would give way to a postulated new horizon of cultural unity and harmony – “a never completely realizable telos of social development” anticipating the reconciliation of the individual and the harmonious integration of all.³⁰

This is the aspiration that Hirschfeld-Mack responded to, as did many other modernists, including de Maistre and Wakelin with their colour experiments. The trouble is that this ultimate resolution has to date never been realized. Does this mean that we can only conceive of these issues today by contrasting a woolly-headed transcendentalism with a now pragmatic materialism, or a simple-minded past with a knowing present? If this conundrum is far from resolved, then we should be alert to the affinities.

²⁹ Georg Simmel, “Money in Modern Culture” (1896), tr. Mark Ritter and Sam Whimster, in: *Theory, Culture & Society*, August 1991, 17.

³⁰ György Márkus, “A Society of Culture: The Constitution of Modernity” in: Gillian Robinson and John Rundell (eds.), *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, London-New York 1994, 15–29.

For instance, the push and pull of counteracting dynamics of specific and generic culture continues to play out. Hirschfeld-Mack argued that the colour light reflections “make possible an infinite number of variations”. Yet, they were simultaneously “strictly organized” by fugue-like music-colour interactions that counteracted the potential for infinite variety. The spiral into disparateness needed to be countered, thus music suggested the anchor of the systematic, the “bridge of communication” to generic cultural understanding – hence, the various appeals to a “latent colour sense”, “the deepest underlying principles of nature” or a “new creative attitude”. Infinity is evoked by curtailed means. Similarly, Richter’s Colour Charts, echo the mundane, everyday routine of life (very 1960s), yet the chart’s endless permutations were similarly curtailed, while still evoking the universal, or the universe, due to their implied infinite expansion, outstripping the ordinary dimensions of human experience.

If the conundrum of two cultural orientations in active tension persists, and if the telos of ultimate reconciliation appears no closer to fulfillment, then this poses the issue of what role art plays in modernist cultures. To date certain aspects of this adventure have been examined extensively – such as probing the debt to neo-Platonic philosophy in early abstraction, with a special inflection on its totalitarian implications – and then there is Germer, who argues that Richter’s charts defiantly demonstrate that colour “is always mediated rather than ‘natural’”, no longer the “the quintessential medium of transcendental experience”. Germer cites the impact of de Duve’s influential essay on the tube of paint. In that essay, however, de Duve quite rightly points out the original aspirations were closer to those outlined in Márkus’ general depiction of modernist culture:

what in the sixties became a matter of deconstruction was first a matter of construction. What was at stake around 1913 was not the analysis, or the ideological critique, of the ‘pictorial language’, it was its synthesis, the ideological legitimization of abstract painting justified as a language.³¹

It is intriguing to consider how far de Duve perpetuates this division by selecting Duchamp and Kandinsky as his prime contrast. De Duve’s account tells of the tension between the specific and generic within art – boldly maintaining that the specific (painting) is not lost in the explanation of Duchamp. He explains how artists, under the pressure of modernity and industrialization, renounce resemblance and take up “the idea of

³¹ de Duve, “The Readymade and the Tube of Paint”, 183-4.

painting as *pure visibility*". In these terms, inherent in the question of colour in early modernism, is the quest to secure painting in its essence – a specificity that "defines painting qua painting, transhistorically and universally", thus the long list of well-known axioms of that period – pure visibility, integrity of the picture plane, faithfulness to materials, "less is more".³² In pursuing specificity, the generic field of art emerged, de Duve explains, so that it became possible to be "an artist, without being a practitioner of a given art" – "you can now be an artist without being either a painter or a sculptor", simply "an artist at large".³³ By focusing on the cultural and artistic pressures that inform colour-form experiments under the pressure of modernity, however, one can gauge how being "an artist at large" was always a distinct possibility, even actively sought. Although the aspiration was wholly different – synthesis was indeed the goal – it is not a question of the specific turning generic, but of grasping how these dimensions were always in active tension. Therefore, the spilling over of one into the other was so not unexpected; the aberrance eventually arose with the understanding that specificity is the "natural" course of modernist art.

Australia 1961, 1968

In 1961, Clement Meadmore curated an exhibition, "The Bauhaus: Attributes and Influences". Drawing on Hirschfeld-Mack's own collection, it focused on earlier colour-form experiments extensively, and it featured Hirschfeld-Mack's colour charts and colour-coded musical instruments in particular. It was also the first significant exhibition of Bauhaus ideas and work in Australia. Meadmore, for his part, was a renowned designer, a jazz drummer, and moving more and more into sculpture. He harboured the fanciful idea of recreating a kind of Bauhaus in Melbourne, but soon gave up on this proposition and instead embarked on an international career in sculpture, based in New York. At much the same time, Hirschfeld-Mack was coming back into prominence as an artist in his own right, particularly in the decade before his death in Sydney in 1965: he was being contacted frequently by institutions in Europe and the United States about his work and his collections; in addition, he was commissioned to recreate his *Colour Light Plays* (*Farbenlichtspiele*) for the new Bauhaus Archive, then located in Darmstadt. Hirschfeld-Mack was merely part of a wider process reconstructing earlier avant-garde art history, which would eventually re-

³² de Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint", 152, 154-5.

³³ de Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint", 154.

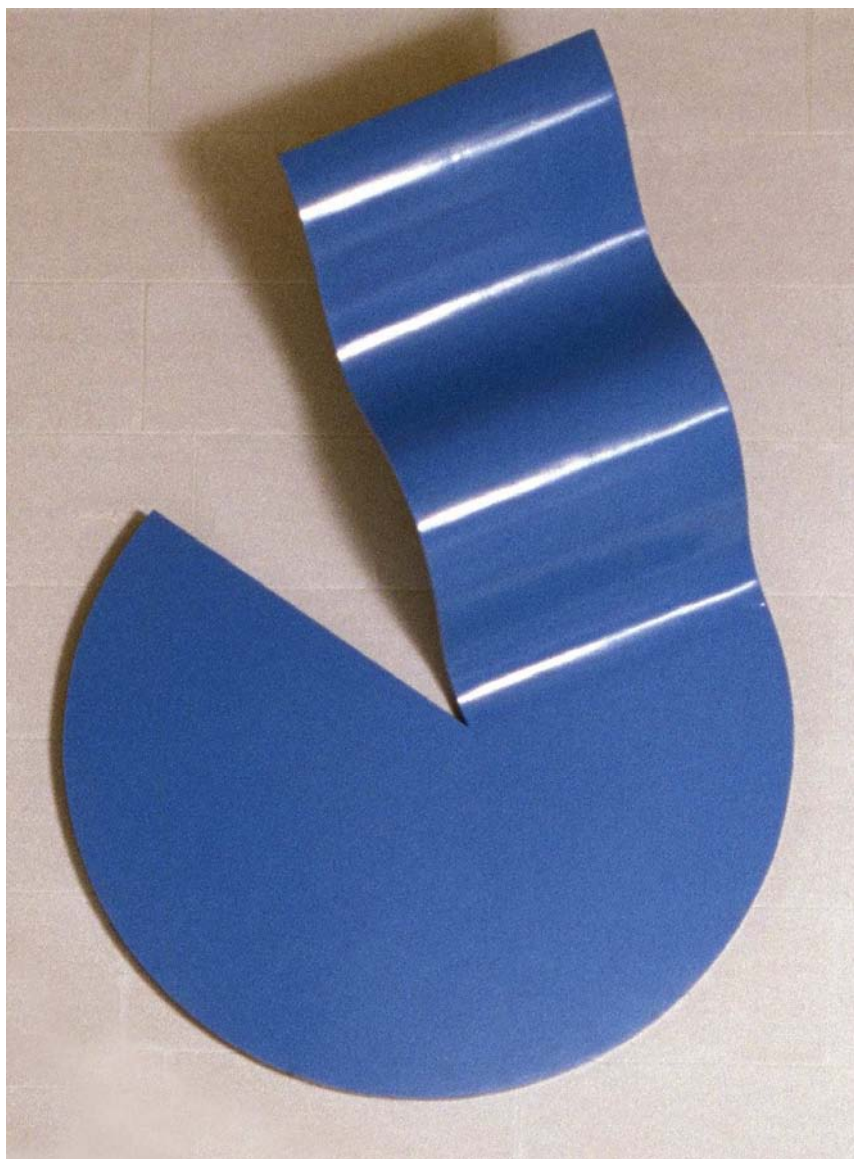


Fig. 36: Sydney Ball (1933-), *Khamisa Blue* 1966–67, laminated plywood, 132 x 175 x 61 cm (Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne. Purchased from John and Sunday Reed 1980). Australian artist, Sydney Ball, was a “colour field” or hard-edge abstract painter in the 1960s, who wrote on colour as a structural or spatial unit and as the basis for a new type of abstraction. He was also produced works based on the flowing curved forms of the ogee.

veal the diversity of practices gathered together under the rubric of modernism. If this recovery fuelled anything in contemporary practice, it was not business as usual.

Throughout the 1960s, the fascination with colour acquired a whole new force with the advent of colour field (or colour form) painting and hard edge abstraction. Because such painting, like Meadmore's sculpture, focused on wholly immanent formal-expressive means, and because his writing influenced so many local artists, it seemed apposite to invite the American critic Clement Greenberg to Australia to deliver the inaugural Power lecture at the University of Sydney. By 1968, however, a lot had changed. In May 1968, the month of Paris' great upheavals, Greenberg's lecture, "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties", focused on the failure and aberrance of modernism, not its celebration. He gave two key reasons for this fateful decline within modernism:

1. From the 1950s on, academic art ceased to pose any meaningful opposition to avant-garde art and was no longer the orthodoxy. Instead, modernist art had become the orthodoxy.
2. By the 1960s, there was an ever-accelerating rush of new labels, trends, tendencies, and schools in art. They did not make their exits as quickly as they arrived on the scene; hence there was a kind of pile-up on the freeway of art, a jumble and much confusion, which did not, Greenberg insisted, amount to a greater artistic diversity or perplexity.³⁴

Against the apparent plurality of this proliferation, Greenberg asserted that there remained a solitary standard of art. Good art was good ascertained by how long a style remained "the vessel of the largest part of important art being produced in a given medium within a given cultural orbit".³⁵ Thus, Greenberg's criteria of quality required circumscribed limits. The chief problem of late 1960s art was the dissolution of artistic boundaries, which, as we have seen with colour art, was apparent long before the 1960s. While Greenberg felt that modernism was losing the plot, what is truly telling is that this unraveling is as much the outcome of immanent forces within modernist painting as much as it is the result of the errant influences of Duchamp, dada and surrealism, various latter day constructivists or minimalism and conceptual art.

³⁴ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties" (1969), reprinted in John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4: 1957-1969, Chicago-London 1993, 292-303, here 292-4.

³⁵ Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes", 295.

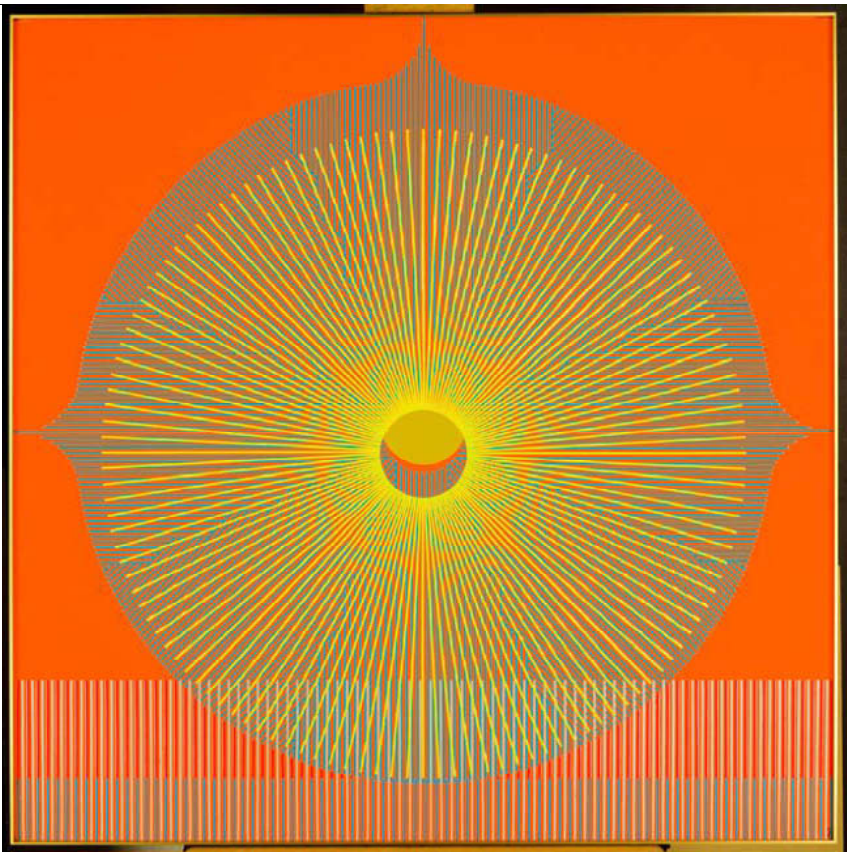


Fig. 37: Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski (1922-1994), *Astra*, 1978-79. Op-collage on aluminium, 119.6 x 119.6 cm (Collection: Queensland Art Gallery). Polish born, Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski, declared his artistic medium to be “light” after experiencing its intensity in Central Australia. He explored light and colour through a variety of media, such as lasers and computers, as well as optical collage works, such as this radiant and late example of his Op Art, *Astra*.

A contemporary Australian abstract painter, Syd Ball, whose practice would very much conform to Greenberg’s parameters, wrote an article on colour in 1967 in which he noted its vital “capacity for motion”. It is not surprising therefore to find investigations into colour quickly resulted in Op Art, which was very popular by the mid-1960s, or kinetic art, which introduced practices involving a wide range of media. Ball went on to suggest that colour necessarily encompasses extra-artistic considerations because it seamlessly intersected with science, philosophy and psychology,

which he welcomed because, like Hirschfeld-Mack before him, it “releases” the new abstraction “from the vacuum in which much contemporary art exists”.³⁶

This realization of colour’s mutability and instability – that it constitutes a profoundly relative phenomenon – became pivotal by and throughout the 1960s. What once plagued a system like de Maistre and Wakelin’s, and led to Wakelin’s disenchantment with it as the basis of a coherent system – colour’s motility and uncertain status – had become a virtue, even a basis for a strategy of how to approach form-colour experimentation with a refreshed mindset. During the 1960s, an earlier modernist like Frank Hinder took the opportunity to use new, technical possibilities to revise older ambitions by focusing on the mutability of colour-form interactions in kinetic art. In this way, Hinder returned to preoccupations that fascinated him at the beginning of his career in the inter-war period, such as futurism, “dynamic symmetry”, and the colour-music demonstrations of A. B. Hector in Australia and Thomas Wilfred in Chicago – that is, many of the influences that also inspired de Maistre and Wakelin. By the late 1960s, Hinder’s “luminal kinetics” meant he employed technical means to produce the *motion* of colour and light.³⁷ Hinder was joined by others in his pursuit of mutable colour-form effects, such as Frank Eidlitz, from Hungary, and Stan Ostoja-Kotkowski, from Poland via Dusseldorf, who were also experimenting with moving coloured light in Australia. In fact, Ostoja-Kotkowski declared that his medium was light rather than painting – or painting with light – and his investigation of laser light projection and computer art grew (seemingly naturally enough) from his intricate “Op-like” paintings utilizing strips of brightly coloured plastic to create similarly vivid colour contrasts and optical sensations. Focused on multi-media light performances, Ostoja-Kotkowski would use lasers and computers to take colour-light experimentation out of the gallery and into the street by projecting onto buildings, thus once again seeking to re-animate the art-life dynamic. These were concerns that revived as much as transformed earlier colour-form experimentation.

³⁶ Sydney (Syd) Ball, “Colour and a New Abstraction”, Broadsheet of the CAS, South Australia, July 1967; reprinted in *Broadsheet of the Contemporary Art Society of Australia* (NSW Branch), August 1967, 5-6. Ball at the time was between extended stays in New York, 1963-65 and 1969-71.

³⁷ Refer Stephen Jones, “Animating Geometry: Drawing with Light”, in: Stephen, Goad & McNamara (eds.), *Modern Times*, 203; Hinder’s comments in Dinah Dysart, “A Productive Partnership: Frank & Margel Hinder Interviewed”, in: *Art and Australia*, 3, Autumn 1992, 342-3; Renée Free, “The Art of Frank and Margel Hinder: 1930-1980”, in: *Art and Australia*, 3, Autumn 1981, 341-8.

Subsequently Everywhere – a Conclusion?

Colour-form experiments trace a meandering line of ambition that waxes and wanes as modernists sought to justify their practices when traditional justifications of art had finally eroded. This may provide one explanation for why we find ourselves fascinated by these projects that we cannot hope to revive with the same ambition – it is not their frantic scope of ambition, but their frailty. Our situation is peculiar: we look back on early modernism as if sometimes gazing on an ancient civilization that held bizarre beliefs we can no longer countenance. At the same time, we continue to applaud (or rediscover) practices that share so many affinities with art of this period – art that expands the field of art, overruns disciplinary boundaries or is collaborative, engages the social or expresses collective possibilities, etc.

For this reason alone, we cannot entertain the conceit that we have today reached a superior position from which to look down on the delusions of earlier generations. Yet, we remain all too aware that we do not respond to these questions with the same answers today. For a start, we lack any expectation of a grand cultural finale that once sustained these seemingly arcane colour experiments. What is our alternative aspiration? Following on from Germer's argument that colour no longer suggests transcendental experience or otherwise some pure essence, Barbara Vinken significantly ups the ante with a rather iconoclastic debunking of classic aesthetic aspirations:

Aesthetics offers no compensation for the loss of the promise of salvation, and is therefore not to be understood as a phenomenon of secularization. Aesthetics is rather the outcome of an insatiable desire for God, misdirected towards the world, finding expression in the fetish and in drugs.³⁸

Although Vinken's provocation derives from a commentary on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, I think it still has resonance for this discussion of colour. We estimate too much of art when at the same time everywhere, everyday its relevance remains in doubt. The effect of modernity is to make it so – that is, frail and disconnected, always in need of an adequate justification (especially when a market justification is not available).

Colour-form experiments were pursued as if searching for a key that would unlock some profound social-cultural gestalt, which would deliver unity where modernity only seemed to offer perplexity. Such art sought to

³⁸ Barbara Vinken, "Loving, Reading, Eating: The Passion of *Madame Bovary*", in: *MLN*, 4, 2007, 759-78, here 760.

unlock a new broader conception of creativity, while simultaneously adhering to a contrary impulse – to tease, provoke, claw away at material form, representation, as well as standard conceptions of art and creativity. For a long time, it was assumed that this polar trajectory would reach a point of resolution. By the 1960s, artists began to explore the vagaries of colour as an everyday perceptual phenomenon, one that is common, but thoroughly perplexing. What appeared immanent to art, in its purity, ended up a riddle, so close, yet so far.

We lack an adequate discourse that clarifies our own present moment – that is, art practices that follow in the wake of such experimentation and its expectations, yet nonetheless evoking its legacy. One option is to remain fixed on the task of achieving a resolution of art and utility, modernist autonomous practices and a general culture, but this has never been achieved throughout the history of modernity and contemporary art has largely abandoned the expectation. Instead it has been assumed by the culture and creative industries, which furiously seek to establish a productive basis for art as well as the humanities. The other alternative is pathos, which often stems from asking too much of art or aesthetics. Pathos arises when we project too much, but find our estimations of art are not reciprocated.

On the other hand, perhaps Richter was right to say (especially in the wake of Vinken's assessment) that we can be most hopeful when we have no expectations at all. Then we can follow Zobernig in exploring the legacy of colour theory and abstraction, but without feeling we do so from a position of superiority, one more knowing, a position removed from the cultural predicament that initially provoked these practices. Once we reach the point that we feel we no longer know everything about art and its history, then we may begin to think once more of the possibilities of the aesthetic or of art. Just as art found colour to be thoroughly perplexing – and not the solution to the perplexity of modernity – so art in turn sought to show that the same is true of everyday experience and thus, in the process, it transformed its ambitions by probing and delineating the perplexity of experience. This is what it means to persist in the wake of this legacy, without pathos, a legacy that we must continue to grasp, despite the fact that the previous efforts at grasping these quandaries have proven elusive, just as colour proved evocative and evasive for art.

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